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ABSTRACT

This book is a political analysis of the role of adult education as an agency of cultural and ideological significance in India from the turbulent period in the 1940s onward. The introduction examines the roots of education in India, the English studies courses that developed when India was a British colony, and continuation of colonial educational policy after India's independence. Chapter 1 surveys the history of British educational involvement in India's educational system from the missionary clause of 1678 through Independence in 1947. Chapter 2 focuses on Gandhi's educational ideas and his basic education policy. The ideology of Nehru and the Congress Party and its application to education are explained in chapter 3. Chapter 4 surveys the various educational strategies of postcolonial India under the Five Year Plans and considers the policy of social education in relation to "nation building." The nonformal revolution in education in the 1970s and the National Adult Education Policy of the late 1970s and 1980s are outlined in chapter 5, and the subsequent radical populist approaches to adult education are traced in chapter 6. Chapter 7 traces movement toward a transformative pedagogy within the context of Nehru's pragmatism, Gandhi's romanticism, and the tradition of British liberal adult education. Contains 153 references. (MN)

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Learning Independence

A Political Outline of Indian Adult Education

Tom Steele and Richard Taylor

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TOM STEELE & RICHARD TAYLOR

LEARNING INDEPENDENCE

A Political Outline of Indian Adult Education

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Preface

This study stems from an initial discussion in the mid-1980s with Professor Roger Fieldhouse of the University of Exeter and we are grateful to him for the original idea of analysing adult education within the ideological context of British colonialism.

Although the focal point of our study is clearly adult education in colonial and post-colonial, independent India, this is not an orthodox historical review and account of adult and continuing education *per se*. Rather, we have attempted a political analysis, centring on the roles of adult education as an agency of cultural and ideological significance in the turbulent period from the 1940s onwards. Adult education in all societies is almost always a politically charged activity but this has been particularly the case in India. Whether seen as a means of ensuring social control and cultural incorporation, or, in sharply contrasting terms, as a potential agency of radical democratisation and empowerment, adult education in India has always had a strongly political dimension. This study discusses these various dimensions and attempts an analysis of the failures, successes and future potential of adult education in this context.

This is not research based upon original sources to any great degree, nor have we had the opportunity for in-depth case study analysis of adult education *in practice*, much as we would have liked to. Nevertheless, we hope that this study will contribute to an understanding of the importance of adult education and its future potential contribution to the development of a more democratic and just society in India.

The bulk of the research was undertaken during a two-year project funded by the British Universities Funding Council (now the Higher Education Funding Council) from 1990 to 1992. The work on India formed one strand of the project, which was concerned with the ideology and history of inter-cultural relationships in the context of adult education: the other two strands concentrated upon Anglo-German relationships in the field of University Extension in the early years of the twentieth century, and the British role in the development of adult education in West Africa in

the post-1945 period. Separate studies on these aspects of the research are in the process of being produced.

Tom Steele was the Research Fellow for this project, which was directed by Professors Marriott, Taylor and Titmus of the University of Leeds. We are grateful to the UFC for their financial support for this research.

In January and February 1991 Richard Taylor visited India in connection with the research for this study. This was a most useful trip, and invaluable for the research project. Thanks are due in particular to Dr S.Y. Shah, who arranged for Richard Taylor to meet many Indian adult educators in Delhi, and who also convened a seminar, with Professor Battachyra of Jawaharlal Nehru University, where Richard Taylor was able to discuss the research issues with Indian academic colleagues. Dr Shah was also a most helpful and friendly host: his hospitality was outstanding and much appreciated by both Richard Taylor and Jenny Taylor, who accompanied him.

Many Indian colleagues agreed to be interviewed and we are grateful in particular to the following, whose insights were invaluable: Professor Krishna Kumar, Professor Soreshachandra Shukla, and Professor Prem Kirpal. We would also like to thank Professor Daswani, who visited us in Leeds, and Professor Alan Rogers, now of the University of Reading. Both have a very extensive knowledge and deep understanding of Indian adult education and gave us useful advice and guidance.

We agonised for some time over a title for this study and we are indebted to our friend and colleague Luke Spencer for solving this problem so satisfactorily. Our thanks also go to Barbara Spurr and Denise Johnson for coping with the manuscript with efficiency and good humour on top of all their other onerous commitments in the University.

Finally, this study has enabled us to get to know at least a little of India and its history and culture. For that we, and our partners Lynne and Jenny, will always be grateful, and this project has encouraged us to pursue further research in India in the future.

Tom Steele
Richard Taylor
Leeds, August 1994

The authors

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Richard Taylor, b. 1945, MA (Oxford), PhD (Leeds) is Professor and Director of Adult Continuing Education at the University of Leeds. He has worked in university adult continuing education since 1970 and is Secretary of the Universities Association for Continuing Education.

His books include: *Social Work: Reform or revolution?* (with Colin Pritchard) (1978), *The Protest Makers* (with Colin Pritchard) (1980), *University Adult Education in England and the USA: A re-appraisal of the liberal tradition* (with Kathleen Rockhill and Roger Fieldhouse) (1985), *Adult Education and the Working Class: Education for the missing millions* (edited with Kevin Ward) (1986), *Against the Bomb: The British peace movement of 1958 to 1965* (1988), and *Campaigns for Peace: British peace movements in the 20th century* (edited with Nigel Young) (1988).

Introduction

English Studies and Subaltern Histories

To write about the history and politics of Indian adult education from a workplace – the University of Leeds – engaged in what Gayatri Spivak calls 'the ideological production of neo-colonialism'[1] may invite hollow laughter from the former beneficiaries of British colonialism. The record cannot of course be put straight from this side but we write in the hope that the marks of what, in the heyday of Victorian imperialism, used to be the metropolitan centre of the world do not too heavily disfigure a narrative which attempts fully to value the work of several generations of radical Indian scholars. Leeds was also 'one of the dark places of the earth' for some of those cultural missionaries, who might otherwise have set off to India and Africa in the nineteenth century, and was itself the object of the civilising mission: Sir Michael Sadler, the Oxford University Delegacy and Bishop Gore's Community of the Resurrection are just a few examples. But margins are relative and we cannot hope to redress the tragic experience of the Indian people under the rule of British imperialism merely by implying that there were parallels in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Instead, we have attempted to write a political account of the origins, developments and counter-currents in Indian adult education, from the East India Company to the post-National Adult Education Policy programmes of the Indian government, not from a celebratory view of the 'elites', British or Indian, but from a standpoint which values those 'hidden from history' and the work of those radical Indian educationalists which is rarely seen in the West.

In the last decade or so the traditional grand narratives of 'Britain and India' have undergone some fundamental scrutiny, so that neither the story of the triumphant mission of British civilisation nor its diametrically opposed story of a one-sided brute imposition of Western values has the credibility it once had. The history

of education in India is part of this contested area. The story of its emancipatory and humanising effects has been told often at the expense of suppressing its function of organising the consent of the subaltern classes and races to their subordination, and of erasing their identities. The countervailing story of a Western-based educational system destroying a rich and pure indigenous culture, too, is told often as if the feudal system that preceded British colonialism did not itself rely on rigid caste systems and exploitation of the common people. Now a more reflective and subtle historiography is being developed by Indian historians themselves and though their spiritual debts are of course to Gandhi, Tagore and the alternative pantheon of Indian leaders, intellectually they owe much to Western traditions of critical theory and deconstruction.

Education as Cultural Imperialism

The argument that education was developed as an instrument of control in colonial countries was deployed by Martin Carnoy and others in the early 1970s. The centre of experimentation was India, the largest and most wealthy of British imperial conquests. Unlike Africa, India had not suffered centuries of destruction through slavery, and its religions and elites were more or less intact when the British took control: indeed, a subtle pattern of alliances with those elites facilitated the development of British rule. The educational purpose of the British, argues Carnoy, was therefore to control rather than change (unlike Africa) and to create a climate in which a free trade might flourish between Britain and India, ultimately in the colonial power's interest, such that manufactured goods flowed out and raw materials returned. British policy therefore concentrated on winning over elites to serve as middlemen between the British high command and important elements of Indian society.[2]

This new stratum had to be nursed into acting for colonial ends in the belief that it was in its best interest to do so and transform local economic and social structures to strengthen colonial control. This produced what Carnoy called a 'culture of dependency' which lasted well after formal independence was achieved. After experimenting with Warren Hastings's version of 'Orientalism', this emerging elite had become 'Anglicised' by the mid-nineteenth century. As Macaulay's famous Minute of 1834 had it: 'We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and

the millions we govern ... a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'.[3]

Key to this educational process was the teaching of English, firstly as the administrative language and, secondly, as literature, the repository of the ideal 'Englishman'. It was Macaulay's brother-in-law Charles Trevelyan who proposed the form of Indian education in his *On the Education of the People of India* (1838).[4] Trevelyan understood from the beginning that India would not be held as a colony indefinitely and therefore a strategy was needed which tied India to Britain commercially, even while inevitably she moved towards independence:

> *No effort of policy can prevent the nations from ultimately regaining their independence. English education will achieve by gradual reform what any other method will do by revolution. The nations will not rise against us, because we shall stoop to raise them ... We shall exchange profitable subjects for still more profitable allies ... and establish a strict commercial union between the first manufacturing and the first producing country in the world.*[5]

Carnoy argues that the form of education envisaged was not to be a deep grasp of principles but an aping and recital of English literature and philosophy, the function of which was, firstly, imparting a vocabulary of administration and governance, and, secondly, instilling awe for English aristocratic virtues and a corresponding disdain for the indigenous culture. It created in effect a reformed Brahmin intellectual class, indifferent to science and technology and with an exaggerated respect for literary culture. From this elite, it was hoped, in the notorious 'trickle-down' theory, that the culture so achieved would seep into the masses below (a policy which had the additional advantage of freeing the administration of further expense on their education).

However, in the long term the main effect of this policy was only to sever the educated elite from the population as a whole. K.C. Vyas maintained in *The Development of National Education in India* (1954) that: 'For all practical purposes, in manners, clothes, languages and tastes, they became English-minded and developed a dislike for those who, unlike themselves, had not taken to an English education. Obviously such persons would never return to the illiterate masses'.[6] This produced, in H.N. Brailsford's

words, a 'land cursed with an unemployed proletariat of intellectuals',[7] who of course turned their redundant energies to subversive ends rather earlier than Trevelyan had expected. An educated class was produced which was both indebted to the educational system but deeply antagonistic to the colonial administration. It has been strongly argued by B.T. McCully that a section of this class generated the Indian nationalist independence movement, which relied on mass mobilisation to oppose British rule.[8] The emergence of Indian nationalism therefore might be seen as an unforeseen outcome of the educational process.

English Studies

In an account of the history and function of English studies in India by one of the new generation of Indian critical scholars, Gauri Viswanathan, India was regarded as an experimental pitch for processes of cultural control through education. Crucial to this experimentation was the development of the specialist area of 'English studies', a subject which was until the early to mid-nineteenth century virtually unheard of, academically, in Britain. Viswanathan argues that the development of English as a discipline is coterminous with the process of colonialism. From being the occasional diversion of the middle classes in their leisure time, 'literature' during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appears to undergo a profound transformation. English studies within the course of little more than a century achieved the status of an academic discipline. It became enshrined within educational institutions, and huge claims were made for its moral, spiritual and intellectual worth, supported by a rapidly growing professional caste of English teachers and literary critics and the establishment of authoritative canons.

English literary study in India begins as a strategy of containment. With the Charter Act of 1813 controlling the activities of the East India Company came the assumption of new responsibilities for 'native education' and a relaxation of the controls over missionary activity. There was an expressed need for 'useful knowledge' and religious and moral improvement of the 'native population'. Since a straightforward Christian mission amongst historically well-entrenched religions was out of the question, politically, 'English' studies appeared to offer a secular solution to some of these problems. Moreover, the initial object of education,

because of frank embarrassment over the conduct of officials of the East India Company itself, was not simply 'native immorality' but the representatives of 'civilisation' themselves. Viswanathan notes:

> *It is impossible not to be struck by the peculiar irony of a history in which England's initial involvement with the education of the natives derived less from a conviction of native immorality, as the later discourse might lead one to believe, than from the depravity of their own administrators and merchants.*[9]

Edmund Burke's speech to the Commons supporting the Bill demanded, 'a strong and solid security for the natives against the wrongs and oppressions of British subjects resident in Bengal'. The subtext of English studies was therefore the construction of an ideal type of Englishman against which the actual representatives of the race might be measured and eventually erased from memory. Instead of the real merchant adventurers making a fast buck, the 'Englishman' would be constructed as a composite ideal, drawn from the great literary tradition. English studies and the construction of Englishness, as Brian Doyle has argued, are not in the end separable.[10] English studies also represented the triumph of the policy of Anglicism over that of Orientalism, although not in its most crude manifestation. Indeed, it was the careful toleration of certain aspects of Orientalism that won for Anglicism a certain softening of its boundaries, a fluidity which encouraged a degree of incorporation.

The policy of Orientalism had been introduced by Warren Hastings in the late eighteenth century as a pragmatic but liberal response to the scale of the problem of government in India caused by the need for native administrators. Hastings argued that good government required a responsiveness to Indian culture rather than a rejection of it, a reaction which in itself demonstrated just how as yet unfixed and relatively open the definition of Englishness was before the high point of imperialism: 'they do not understand our character and we do not penetrate theirs ... we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affections'.[11] Thus rather than intensifying the force of a national identity as yet not fully achieved, Hastings suggested a kind of 'reverse acculturation' in which Indian culture should be studied and respected, a policy which produced the great scholars of Orientalism, Jones, Colebrooke and Horace Wilson. The liberal imperialist function of Orientalism en-

visaged at this stage ranged from 'the initiation of the West to the vast literary treasures of the East, to the reintroduction of the natives to their own cultural heritage', a policy characterised by Edward Said as 'the dialectic of information and control'.[12] This is recognisable as the language of multi-culturalism and incorporation rather than exclusion and orthodoxy and reflects a greater confidence in the hegemonic colonialist culture's ability to absorb and enrich itself from the Eastern 'treasure-house' while allowing the 'natives' the dignity of their own inheritance.

This subtlety was lost on the subsequent generation of imperialists. Indeed, the counter-movement to Hastings's Orientalism began almost immediately. The policy of Anglicism subsequently promoted, drew, ironically, for comparative evaluations on the very Orientalist scholarship Hastings had promoted, and Lord Cornwallis, Hastings's successor as Governor General in 1786, blamed Orientalism precisely for dalliance and lack of moral fibre. As a culture, he claimed, it induced idleness, neglect of civic responsibility, fatalism and, most importantly, was bad for business. Thus while Hastings's policy had drawn in Indians to positions of responsibility, Cornwallis now rigorously excluded them, giving strength to the myth that Indians were incapable of it. This policy of inflexible Anglicism was, however, given the vast scale of the Indian administration, simply impracticable; a native administration had to be cultivated and the post-Cornwallis generation of administrators adopted a much more flexible compromise. Opening out once more to native traditions, they cultivated an alliance with the traditional rulers in a quasi-feudal mortmain. This was a conscious policy of organicism which, in 1813, contrived to 'engraft', in the educationalist J.H. Harrington's terms, English onto traditional methods of learning, from which horticulture the resulting hybrid was to be the 'Anglo-Indian' – a fragrantly spiced and darker-hued variety of the European stock.

It became clear, however, that British administrative needs could not simply be 'engrafted' onto Indian society without a more substantial transformation of the 'Indian character' than had been envisaged. Hinduism came to be seen as an obstacle to utilitarian and 'scientific' knowledge and pressure grew from both free traders and the Clapham Evangelical sect for an ethos of reform and conversion. Thus almost despite itself the British administration was drawn into a more actively interventionist educational policy. But the problem was, for obvious reasons, that such an education

could not be left either to the Christian missionaries or to the Hindu colleges. Thus the English Education Act of 1835 effectively created separate semi-official institutions for the teaching of English and removed official funding from the native institutions – a policy fundamentally opposed by Orientalists such as Horace Wilson, a member of the Committee of General Instruction.

English studies were pioneered, almost against his will, by a subscriber to Christian evangelism, Alexander Duff, in his Free Church Institution. Duff was naturally very suspicious of the official educational policy of secularism, which he rightly perceived had been instituted in India in a spirit of experimentation. India was used, he said, as 'a fair and open field for testing the non-religion theory of education',[13] to which his own response was to accommodate secularism to evangelicalism by sleight of hand and deliberately choose literary texts for their 'Christian' values. In the English curriculum which he developed, Milton and Cowper were prominent authors, as might be expected, but so were Bacon and even Schlegel. However, the bulk of the reading matter was probably comprised of such works as Pollock's *Selection from English Verse* and Macaulay's *Lays*.

English literary study's founding moment, therefore, already included a complex agenda which involved on the one hand a secular programme of acculturation to British business and administrative needs and on the other a deeply coded subtext of 'spiritual values'. English literature more than any other national literature was seen as the repository of the word of God. Shakespeare, according to Duff, was 'full of religion', which, problematically, none but Christians could recognise.

It was always a dangerous strategy, because interpreting the code demanded an initiated mentor, who, of course, in the absence of a profession, could not always be relied on to give a canonical reading. Thus it was not long before complaints were made about the outcomes of such teaching. Shakespeare, for example, was for some certainly full of religion but of the wrong kind. His excessively *pagan* language contained words like 'fortune', 'fate', 'muse' and, worst of all, 'nature'. While many educated Indians made their way into Christianity, others discovered not only the noble ideal that was intended but the cunning and subversive anti-hero of *Paradise Lost*, Satan, and made their own comparisons between divine and secular imperialisms. They were, gratifyingly, in the minority. For the secular administration, however, Christianity

was a side-issue to the central matter of an ideal of Englishness. Trevelyan wrote that through the study of English literature, '[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, [and] perhaps gain higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse were of a more personal kind'.[14]

English was taught more as a branch of history than of rhetoric and the return to secularism reintroduced a classical emphasis that attempted to endorse the legitimacy and authority of British institutions. Crucially, it offered a cumulative representation of the 'truly civilised man' which would return the student to a unity with himself and repudiate false thinking about the justice and fairness of British rule. Being English was inscribed within a larger discourse of the necessary development of civilisation which sufficiently obscured the elision between the English part and the human whole, such that the two became identical. To study English was to study the growth from barbarism to civilisation of which the British empire was the shining and inevitable example. To become human was to become English. The extraordinary *trompe l'oeil* of the process was the construction of the ideal Englishman from the texts, which, as Trevelyan suggested, could replace in the imagination, and memory, those flawed material representatives who actually wielded power.

Viswanathan's study of the origins of English studies reveals therefore a more subtle and inflected story than the earlier radical anti-colonialist accounts. Its strength derives in part from the fact that it belongs to a current of radical intervention by Indian scholars who have refused to inscribe themselves into what they regard as the opposed, but in the end bound together, Western discourses. For many of them Edward Said's *Orientalism* was a key text because it revealed how Europeans constructed the identity of 'the Oriental' as a subordinate subject. Said's pioneering interrogation of the concept of Orientalism demonstrated that the learned disciplines that went into its construction during the nineteenth century were far from being scientifically objective.[15] Constructions of 'race', such as those of the French philosopher Ernest Renan, for example, were made less in the spirit of disinterested enquiry than in the service of a resurgent French nationalism in eager competition with its German and English counterparts. The 'Oriental' was constructed by European colonial powers as an 'Other' to national identity, which, while it contained subtle, exotic attractions and

brooding mysteries, nevertheless represented the people of Asia as a kind of inferior species, often childlike, lacking in moral rectitude, incapable of sustained work and civic virtue and, most importantly, ripe for an application of the civilising mission which it was the duty of the Western powers to impart.

Significantly, it is women Indian scholars of English literature who have made the most of Said's insights, through which they have been able to make new, non-canonical readings of 'the Indian novel' such as, for example, Forster's *A Passage to India*, Conrad's *Lord Jim* or Edward Thompson's *An Indian Day*. Pathak, Sengupta and Purkayastha noted:

> *Said's* Orientalism *was thus seized by us initially as a crucial critical tool which could help us articulate our inchoate perturbances. It seemed to offer a coherent and ideologically compelling resolution to our dilemma. It now became possible to re-read texts like* An Indian Day *and locate in them a disguised series of explanations and rationalisations that justified the imperial British presence in India.*[16]

However, even Said's account was not entirely satisfying, and partly under the influence of Gayatri Spivak the critique has been advanced further. They felt that while Said had enabled them to construct an alternative history to that of the dominant 'white text', it was nevertheless still only 'a monologic history', because 'it does not help us to recuperate the other narratives which interrupt the hegemony of the narrative of imperialism'.[17] In effect, they argued, Said had opened up the spaces for counter-discourses but had not allowed them to be voiced. Instead he had collapsed them into the dominant discourse of imperialism by assuming that they were ultimately produced and controlled by it. They felt that the historical vision of *Orientalism*, as constructed by Said, privileged only one element in the struggle for power in that period, namely the British imperialist power, and homogenised the opposing force. He had neglected the collaborationist role of the rajahs, the zamindari, and the pre-history of colonial exploitation:

> *The West is not the most influential other in the creation of the Indian self. In the brute reality of our everyday experience we have also to contend with structures of exploitation that pre-existed the British rule. It was this political alliance that empowered the West to produce a system of ideological*

> *interpellation that was calculated at a particular historical moment to be the best bet for political hegemony.*[18]

While questions of culturally constructed identities have been pioneered by women scholars in India, a new Indian historiography has been developed by a group of (mostly) men around the *Subaltern Studies* journal. According to its editor Ranajit Guha, all histories of India, whether written from a British or Indian standpoint, have represented the history of India only as a history of *elites*. What is missing from these histories, which concentrate on the Nehrus, Gandhis and Jinnas, is the constitutive role of an enormous mass of subaltern Indians, mostly the urban poor and the peasantry, who resisted the British rule in terms quite distinct from those of the nationalist elite.[19] The project of the *Subaltern Studies* group therefore was to rewrite that history from the distinct and separate point of view of the masses, for whom the difference between their British and Indian masters was of less significance. In Guha's words:

> *What clearly is left out of this un-historical historiography is the* politics of the people. *For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country.*[20]

For Guha this is not just a failure of the historical imagination but a function of the historical power bloc since Independence which was due, he says, to the historical failure of the nation to come to its own. Independence had not created a genuinely post-colonial situation or liberated the great mass of the people from economic oppression. The group has begun reconstructing that history, much in the manner of the History Workshop movement in Britain, by using unconventional or neglected sources, popular memory, oral discourse and neglected colonial administrative documents. It has also used the cultural theorising of, among others, Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault. The effect has been to open up a cultural politics front in which to contest the orthodox and conventional accounts of Indian history. Spivak has noted that this historical deconstruction relies on two main propositions.

Firstly, this history is misunderstood if it is seen only as transitional from feudalism to capitalism: it should instead be seen as a series of moments of change which should be plotted as pluralised confrontations rather than as continuous transition. Secondly, there are functional changes in sign-systems, of which the most important is from the religious to the militant. The most significant outcome of this revision is to locate the agency of change within the insurgent or 'subaltern'.

Adult Education

As yet this new historiography has not extended far into adult education but it clearly relates to the Indian tradition of a radical critique of education. The Subaltern Studies critique of the Indian elite meshes with the later revisionist work of Western educationalists such as Carnoy and Samoff on the role of nationalist elites within 'transition' states generally.[21] Although their concern is not directly with India but with other Third World socialist countries, the analogy cannot be missed. Nehru and the Congress Party generally were identified – and identified themselves – as socialist and inhabited a clearly socialist discourse. Their conclusion is that, since the mere transition to a 'socialist' economy is no guarantee of a transformed way of life, the social transformation of previously colonial countries has to be achieved by multiple struggles on multiple fronts. Rather more than in capitalist countries it is *education* which has been seen as the key to social and economic development with a rapid expansion of both formal schooling and non-formal adult education.[22] The expansion has focused on those segments of the population which were least empowered in the previous colonial political economy. Although the main function of this expansion has been to increase skills and reduce inequalities in access, education is also expected to play a key role in transforming social relations:

> *This role is shaped by the ideal of making educated labour the keystone of a more productive, modernised, participative economy, based on a collectivist or socialist ideology. Educational expansion and content are also shaped by the ideal of developing a new indigenous and revolutionary sense of national history. Part of that ideal is to give a prominent place in creating history to groups marginalised by conditioned*

capitalism.[23]

In effect, however, the new leaderships have compromised these ideals in the face of 'a world dominated by capitalist financial institutions, transnational manufacturing and service enterprises, core countries' dominance of technological creativity and their conflict with the Soviet Union'.[24] Thus education in the 'transition states' is still characterised largely by formality and hierarchy and there seems to be a clear relationship between increased state bureaucracy and reliance on traditional, hierarchical, formal schooling.

To the veteran radical Indian educationalist J.P. Naik this was nothing new. His sustained critiques of the Indian educational reforms, Tiresias-like, record with weary fatalism yet another turning of the elitist wheel. Commenting on the Janata Party's radical NAEP programme of the early 1980s, he noted:

> *The ruling classes with their strongly entrenched system of formal education, yield to these plans in deference to populist slogans of mass education and calls to improve the lot of the poor. But they remain unenthusiastic and will try to divert these funds to the usual traditional sectors as they have in the past whenever the opportunity allows and in this they find good allies in the revolution-wallas who provided them with all the moral arguments to condemn the programmes. Some of the ruling groups see in these programmes yet another opportunity to make a pile for themselves while they appear to serve the poor, as they will no doubt succeed in doing.*[25]

Refusing Educational Modernity

One of the most sustained critical surveys of Indian education since Independence to be advanced by the new thinking has been that of Krishna Kumar in his book *The Political Agenda of Education* (1991). Kumar shows with relentless scholarship and argument that in large part Indian educational policy has been continuous from the British Raj, of which the educational ideal or core agenda has been to produce the 'colonial citizen'. He dismisses the more usual criticism that colonial educational policy functioned simply to produce an army of clerks, for which there is little evidence, but notes rather that at the heart of the colonial enterprise was an adult–child relationship: 'Like the little elephant

Babar in the children's series of that name some of the natives had to be educated so that they could be civilised according to the master's idea'.[26] A corpus of natives had to become civilised enough to run the administration in a trustworthy and mature manner and for this not just clerks but political leaders, professionals and intellectuals were necessary; hence the bureaucracy's perception of primary education for the masses as 'expensive without being beneficial' and its concentration on higher education for the few.[27] Under the British, the notion of 'citizenship' was co-extensive with that key concept in liberal thought, the ownership of property. A small civil society was encouraged to emerge in which an educated citizenry exercised its right to own and increase its property in the midst of the exploitation of the mass of working people.

A notable aspect of the continuity from the British to the post-Independence system was the persistence of the Victorian discourse of 'character formation' and the perception of the uneducated population as an object of moral improvement. The notion of the 'moral teacher' and emphasis on moral development also echoed the Brahminical ideal. Brahmin families provided the majority of the nationalist leadership and their social distance from the masses proved a fertile ground for the sense of moral superiority and upper-caste status to flourish. The nationalist leadership also endorsed English education in preference to traditional Indian modes as a means through which modernisation could be effected. They understood well enough that Independence could not mean a return to the pre-colonial settlement but that a fusion with some traditional elements was desirable. Kumar argues that in the writings of the leading nationalists educational discourse acquired a nationalist slant without losing 'its homonymic ability to accommodate the two distinct connotations of moral discipline which the imperialist discourse on the one hand, and the traditional Indian discourse on the other, had associated with education'.[28] As we argue later, the outstanding exceptions to this educational formation were Gandhi, Tagore and Gijubhai, whom, against the grain, Kumar suggestively characterises as *modernists*. In the pedagogy of *nai talim*, Gandhi's concept of Basic Education, religious teaching and moral improvement are conspicuously absent.

If Gandhi's idea had been put into practice, there would have been a sharp break with the colonial discourses. Instead, Kumar argues, despite the utilitarian rhetoric of education for the people, elementary education remained miserably poor in most parts of In-

dia and only the development of higher education received any priority. However, it was this very progress in higher education that had the effect of mystifying the colonial educational agenda, since it was 'to develop an educated citizenry sharing many crucial items of symbolic property with the colonisers'.[29] The most overt among these was the English language but also less visibly were meanings associated with 'knowledge', 'culture' and 'progress'. However, nothing was more important than the initiation of the educated Indian into the Englishman's perception of the Indian masses as both superstitious and ignorant and in need of moral uplift through education. In this way the new Indian elite reproduced the colonisers' perception of Indian society as a whole.

Another aspect of the failure to break with the past was the reinforcement of the dominance of the Brahmins, despite popular pressure in many parts of India for emancipation. The teacher's role in fact continued to pursue the authoritarian Brahminical ideal and refuse a new pedagogical culture of equality. The teacher as guru appears not only to have survived the onslaught of colonialism but to have been reinforced by it. According to Kumar, 'the schoolteacher continued to perform an ancient political function, that of *subduing* the spirit of curiosity and questioning'.[30] Thus a textbook culture backed by a servile but authoritarian teaching profession has prevented the emergence of a pedagogical modernism.

The legacy of the Independence struggle has therefore been extremely ambivalent. The dream of social transformation for a downtrodden and caste-ridden poor has been transformed, in effect, under the pressure of utilitarian liberalism, into a demand for upward mobility for individuals. The liberal assumption that the market would maximise the collective good was even less successful in India than it has been in Britain and further served to legitimise colonial exploitation and privilege native elites. These elite groups further justified a reproduction of the public school system in the name of India's need for leaders of government, the military, business and industry. The discourse of character formation and moral improvement has provided the cement for this self-legitimation and self-identity.

One consequence of this ambivalent legacy has had particular political importance, namely, the erosion of the secular state under the pressure of religious revivalism. Conservative educational methods have in part been responsible for this but Kumar is especially critical of Nehru's role in failing to pursue a national secular

identity rigorously enough. This he feels could have been pursued through educational means, but in practice the failure to create an effective modern primary system left social life and culture to be shaped by 'widespread illiteracy and the power of religious answers to basic questions concerning material life'.[31] Ironically, the modernism pursued by Nehru in the industrial sphere may now only serve cultural revivalism to the detriment of social justice and equality. Kumar is frankly disturbed by this legacy and the current cultural revivalism which, echoing Orwell, appears to him to lead only to 'a long corridor of darkness'. He concludes ominously: 'Perhaps it is not just for the sake of nostalgia that we need to underline that had the state under Nehru not scoffed at the Gandhian path of re-defining modernity, we might have been facing quite a different scene today. The challenge still remains, and becomes clearer each day'.[32]

Although Kumar's critique runs contrary to some fashionable Western post-modernist themes, the questions it raises are too substantial to be dissolved into discourse alone. The seeming inability of the nationalist state to effect a complete rupture from the colonialist agenda has allowed many features of neo-colonialism to emerge and the continued immiseration of the vast mass of the Indian population speaks for itself. Education on its own clearly cannot effect the desired programme of social justice and equality (indeed the conservative versions of post-modernism do not even see it as desirable). Without a political will and an effective productive system, such fundamental changes cannot be accomplished, but, equally, it must be acknowledged that educational development is central to such changes. Our study shows, we hope, that there are reasons for optimism in the sphere of adult education, if not necessarily in the compulsory sector. Here, participatory techniques of development education, such as those summarised in Chapter 7, offer a truly 'modernist' alternative to the Brahminical system. Similarly, the determination of women educationalists to work within flexible educational/employment programmes for low-caste women and bring the techniques and perceptions of the women's movement to bear can be seen as a genuine rupture with colonialist pedagogies. They are of course small-scale and pathetically under-funded, often relying massively on voluntary work and foreign aid, but they represent a rejection of fatalism and a positive model for the future for both East and West.

Our study does not pretend to be an examination of primary

sources, nor is it based on case study evidence. Rather, we have attempted to survey the largely secondary information available about Indian adult education and to analyse and theorise its practice within a broader social and political context. Much of this debate will be of relevance principally to those working in Western metropolitan environments, who may be unaware of the high standard of debate and discussion on educational matters in India, much of which is germane to Western 'provincial' concerns. In these matters the margins can often be found actually to occupy the centre. We have tried, where possible, with the major exception of the work of Alan Rogers, to use indigenous sources and limit Western commentaries to those of strict relevance.

Summary of Chapters

The structure of the study is chronological, beginning with the educational policy in relation to the East India Company's activities from the seventeenth century, through Independence, the policies of Social Education and the National Adult Education Policy (NAEP), to the participatory and transformative educational experiments of the 1980s. Chapter 1 briefly surveys the whole history of British educational involvement, from the missionary clause of 1678 to Independence in 1947. Although the objective of spreading Christianity was explicit in the Company's charter, it was largely confined to specific areas and had no large-scale impact. A positive programme of education was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century as the central element of the policy of Anglicism. The top-heavy development of higher education produced the frustrated and disillusioned group which formed the leadership of the nationalist movement. We conclude that British educational initiatives in India reflected the fractured ideological structure of its own domestic practice. The British cultural curriculum was ill-fitted to popular needs and adult education was largely vestigial. Only when the diarchy, or power sharing, was introduced in the 1920s was a sustained adult educational programme introduced, largely based on developing literacy.

Chapter 2 focuses on Gandhi's educational ideas, especially his *nai telim* or Basic Education policy which was outlined at the Wardha Conference in 1937. Gandhi has become the symbolic property of radical populist movements both in India and Third World countries generally, and significantly of peace movements

globally. We consider his opposition to Western industrialisation and his ambivalent relationship to modernity. The homology of many of his ideas with Western libertarian and socialist humanist currents in the late nineteenth century is remarkable and we consider his intellectual relationship with Ruskin, Tolstoy and Dewey. The craft-based, village education envisaged in *nai telim* was not in the end pursued by the nationalists, who had their own project of urban industrialisation. Using the work of Partha Chatterjee and Krishna Kumar we speculate on the use the nationalist leadership made of Gandhi.

In Chapter 3 we address the ideology of Nehru and the Congress Party and its application to education. Nehru was both upper caste and strongly influenced by English culture. His political perspectives were closer to the democratic socialist traditions of the British left than to Marxism or Soviet Communism, and like most of the Congress Party leaders he lacked a close rapprochement with the Indian people. This was Gandhi's unique link. Despite Nehru's socialist objectives, the state under Congress saw the rapid growth of a rapacious capitalist class. Nehru's reaction to this was to reactivate the *panchyat* system in the Third Five Year Plan, to emphasise decentralisation and education. However, the notorious bureaucracy and corruption of state and local government frustrated these ambitions and it has to be asked just how much political commitment there was to the educational reforms proposed.

Chapter 4 surveys the various educational strategies of Post-Colonial India under the Five Year Plans. The fascination with industrial modernisation dominated educational policy-making. Both Western and Soviet models influenced policy at different times but education was made to bear an impossible ideological burden. Educational policy could not stand in for the necessary economic and industrial transformation and so constantly crashed up against a pre-determined impossibility. The intervention of Western expertise in adult education ranged from advocating a return to liberal traditions on the one hand, to Frank Laubach's fruitful 'Each One Teach One' programmes supported by foreign aid. With the demise of the lure of 'modernisation' the demand has become increasingly for 'participation'. The state system increasingly gave way to voluntary and foreign-funded initiatives of a radical character which promised a short-circuiting of departmental bureaucracy.

The chapter continues by examining more closely the policy of Social Education and its relation to 'nation-building'. The adult

education budget remained pathetically small and suggested a lack of political will towards mass education. Azad's 1949 formulation of the policy of Social Education was a bold attempt at a genuine citizenship education, which in the First Five Year Plan made spectacular progress. The advent of the Community Development programmes, however well-intentioned, had the effect of introducing greater bureaucracy and an ever-growing mountain of deeply unreliable statistics. Kothari's Educational Commission of the mid-1960s suggested radical reforms of the programme, which by this time had become bogged down in bureaucracy and corruption. His 1960s Utopianism withered under the neglect of resources and political suspicion and his suggested reforms were not fulfilled. A growing and relatively independent professional educational establishment, including J.P. Naik and Anil Bordia, began to produce systematic critiques of educational policy which highlighted the corruption and political chicanery of the programmes and hastened the political perception of the need for radical reform and pointed towards the radical National Adult Education Policy.

The non-formal revolution in education (NFE) of the 1970s and the NAEP of the late 1970s and 1980s are the subject of Chapter 5. NFE tended to dissolve the distinction between adult education and that for young people and grew as an alternative to the formal state schooling. It was criticised as a cheap alternative but had the effect of introducing radical techniques into schooling. The project-based approach replaced the community development blocks and made for greater co-operation between government departments. The NAEP was introduced to define the particular role of adult education within NFE and was directed at the poorest sections of society including the rural poor, tribal people and women. Indian commentators were, however, extremely sceptical of the political determination necessary to sustain the revolution.

Following the NAEP initiative we see in Chapter 6 how a raft of radical populist approaches swirled through Indian adult education, often organised through the voluntary sector and funded at least in part externally. This was swept along on a wave of revolutionary rhetoric which referenced Gandhi's *nai telim*, Julius Nyrere's 'nation-building' and Paulo Freire's 'conscientization' in a single trope. The District Resource Unit decentralised the operating base for adult education in many areas and mobile teams of trainers brought the beacon of revolution to far-flung communities. The Dawn Movement adapted the *Gram Shikshan Mohim* tech-

niques of mass literacy through total village ownership of education. Perhaps the most truly radical change was the development of women's education. This was based initially on techniques of consciousness-raising generated in the Western women's movement but now developed in relation to functional literacy and empowerment programmes. Women were encouraged to break free of their dependence on and subordination to men, to nurture sisterhood and mutual solidarity and to become economically independent.

We conclude that this revolution is still in progress, and with its insistence on a participatory and transformative education it may yet hold the key to total literacy, citizenship and a higher quality of life for India's poor. As Alan Rogers insists, the great potential it signals for *Western* systems of adult education should not be ignored. We conclude, therefore, that there has been a substantial gap between the rhetoric and achievement of adult education, which has been a failing of various governments but, in larger part, a consequence of the sheer size and post-colonial structural problems of India. The two models of political change echoed in the language of adult education are both inadequate: the pragmatism of Nehru and the romanticism of Gandhi. Neither bureaucratic macro-state systems of top-down provision nor a romantic yearning for a mythical rural golden age can be a substitute for a reflexive response to popular needs. Nor should the contribution of British liberal adult education be ignored. Local democratic control and clear and articulate educational agenda are essential for the task of working with people in their own localities. The success of Indian developments in small-scale transformative pedagogies, in this respect, is of global significance.

Notes

1. R. Guha and G. Spivak, eds, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 19.
2. Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Longmans, 1974), p. 81.
3. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.100.
4. Charles Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India* (Green and Longmans, 1838).
5. Quoted in Carnoy, 1974, p. 101.
6. K.C. Vyas, *The Development of National Education in India* (Bombay: Vora, 1954), p. 49.

7. Quoted in Carnoy, 1974, p. 102.
8. B.T. McCully, *English Education and the Origins of English Nationalism* (Peter Smith, 1966).
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12. *ibid.*
13. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 65.
14. Trevelyan, 1838, p. 152.
15. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 1980).
16. Zakia Pathak, Saswati Sengupta and Sharmila Purkayastha, 'The prison house of orientalism', *Textual Practice*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1991, pp. 195–218, 207.
17. *ibid.*, p. 215.
18. *ibid.*, p. 209.
19. Guha, 1988, p. vi.
20. *ibid.*, p. 40.
21. Martin Carnoy, Joel Samoff *et al.*, *Education and Social Transition in the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 1990).
22. *ibid.*, p. 362.
23. *ibid.*, pp. 362–3.
24. *ibid.*, p. 363.
25. J.P. Naik, 'Non-formal education in India: a retrospect and a prospect', in A.B. Shah and Susheela Bhan, eds, *Non-Formal Education and the NAEP* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 223–41.
26. Krishna Kumar, *The Political Agenda of Education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), p. 24.
27. *ibid.*, p. 29.
28. *ibid.*, p. 44.
29. *ibid.*, p. 192.
30. *ibid.*, p. 193.
31. *ibid.*, p. 196.
32. *ibid.*, p. 193.

Chapter 1

Contested Concepts: The Development of Education in British India from the Early Years to Independence

The ideology and the practice of education lay at the centre of social and political development in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Indian nationalist movement grew from the interaction between educational development and the practice of British rule: and from this movement, of course, came eventually Independence in 1947 and the dominance of the Congress Party.[1] Adult education in India must be seen in this wider context if its full importance and ideological roles are to be understood. This chapter analyses the growth of education in India concentrating on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and contextualises ideologically our subsequent and more detailed discussion of adult education itself.

Education in India, prior to British involvement, was rural and religious. It was also structured absolutely within the caste system. F.W. Thomas, writing in 1891, described the position as follows:

> *The lower orders were entirely uninstructed. The castes of middle rank, including the landholding and trading class, received a scanty and, in the case of the Hindus, strictly commercial training. Every Brahmin was able to read and write, and there was a considerable body of men of this class ... (who had) ... obtained considerable eminence in such special studies as grammar, logic, rhetoric, mathematics and metaphysics.*[2]

In this tradition, religious questions were central. Education was construed as individually-centred, and concerned essentially with the large questions of the meaning of life and the means

whereby human beings can distance themselves from material concerns and concentrate instead upon the spiritual and the metaphysical.

A leading authority on Indian adult education, S.C. Dutta, has characterised the essential Indian perspective of education as being associated with the religious questions of existence, with life and death. 'For Indians, the aim of Education is ... the inhibition of those activities of mind by which it gets connected with the whole world of matter or objects, and the individual must achieve his emancipation, his escape from the bondage, from the vicious circle of birth and death. Education must aid this self-fulfilment, and not in the acquisition of mere objective knowledge!'[3] One of the major effects of British rule in India was to introduce a wholly different Western, rationalist and secular concept and practice of education. And this in turn was intimately connected with the rise of Indian nationalism, as is discussed below. However, it would be quite mistaken to view this process as a straightforward conflict between an indigenous spiritual tradition and an explicitly secular British 'import'. In fact, the original British motivation for educational provision was itself primarily religious. In the early years of the East India Company, virtually no attention was paid to educational questions.[4] It was 'a primarily commercial concern':[5] though even in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there were numerous unofficial Christian missionary activities. In 1659 the Court of Directors of the Company explicitly stated their objective of spreading Christianity in India; and in 1678 Parliament inserted the 'missionary clause' into the Company's Charter.

This early missionary activity had little concern with wider educational issues, was restricted largely to support for a small number of charity schools, and overall had little impact. However, it laid the foundations for subsequent educational development. In 1792 Charles Grant put forward to Parliament a passionate advocacy of evangelical work in India. Through this process of Christian-centred education, based on 'correct mechanical principles' as well as on the 'reading of the scriptures', India would be led forward to a new civilisation. 'Idolatry with all the rabble of its impure deities, its monsters of wood and stone, its false principles and corrupt practices, its delusive hopes and vain fears, its ridiculous ceremonies and degrading superstitions, its dying legends and fraudulent impositions would fall.'[6] With strong support from William Wilberforce, this view was incorporated in the renewal of the

Company's Charter in 1813, when the ban on missionary activity was removed, and there thus began the real drive towards missionary education in India.

The ideology underlying such missionary zeal was a fairly crude form of cultural imperialism. However, from the beginning, the religious foundation was combined with English ideas of both *liberal* education and *vocational* training. The Directors of the Company were somewhat reluctant to give their support to the extreme evangelism of Grant and his kind, but they could see the sense in providing instruction in English language, mathematics, history, geography and other basic subjects. Such provision would provide a supply of English-speaking Indians for the growing number of clerical and related posts in British India. Colleges for these purposes – a mixture of Christian religious instruction and English language and other subject education – were established in the early nineteenth century in Calcutta, Agra, Benares and Delhi. In Bombay, the Governor, Mountstuart Elphinstone, gave more emphasis to vernacular, as opposed to English language, education, which, he argued, should be left to the voluntary sector.

Although Elphinstone's influence was short-lived – he retired in 1827 – his views highlighted a continuing controversy within the movement for educational development in India in the nineteenth century. The 'Anglicist versus Orientalist' debate was closely related to an equally important and divisive issue: should education be aimed at an elite, who would then be expected to educate the masses (the filtration theory), or should *mass* education be the immediate objective? The first of these issues was clearly resolved in favour of an English orientation, with profound consequences for the nature of the subsequent nationalist movement. The second issue has been persistently disputed right through to the present day. Given the scale of the educational problems to be addressed there has been a tendency, post-1947 as much as earlier, to opt for variations on the filtration model. This accounted for the British Government's concentration on the 'pinnacle' of the hierarchy, the universities, and, secondly, the secondary schools. Primary education was virtually ignored. This hierarchical model of education also dovetailed naturally with both the ideology and the structures of English education. It is in this contested area that adult education in India has made one of its major contributions, primarily through literacy provision.

The decision to introduce a positive programme of English

education was taken in 1835: 'a momentous step taken by the British Raj.'[7] Lord Macaulay, who was President of the Committee of Public Instruction in the 1830s, was a prime mover in the Anglicist movement. Writing in 1835, Macaulay stated that, although he had 'no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic ... I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.'[8] This strongly Anglicist view of educational provision was combined, from this period onwards, with an explicit avowal of the importance of training a new stratum of educated Indians to assist in governing the Raj. Charles Trevelyan, for example, wrote in 1839 that: 'We want native functionaries of a new stamp, trained in a new school; and adding to the acuteness, patience, and intimate acquaintance with the language and manners of the people which may always be expected in natives, some degree of the enlightened views and integrity which distinguish the European officers.'[9]

Sir Charles Wood's famous dispatch of 1854 (and subsequent Act giving force to his proposals) reiterated these points, acknowledged that in principle the Government was responsible for popular education, and advocated the establishment of Education Departments in each of the territorial divisions of British India. However, Wood also recognised that, whilst the elite should be taught in English and should be enculturated into European civilisation, the only medium through which European knowledge could be communicated to the masses was evidently one or another of the vernacular languages of India.[10]

The latter half of the nineteenth century thus saw a huge increase in educational provision in India at all levels. From a minimal base before 1850, there were, by 1885, 78 arts colleges and a further 21 professional colleges, with a total of over 9,000 students. By 1902 there were 140 arts colleges with 17,000 students. There was a similar growth in secondary schools: by the early 1880s there were 486 such institutions with over 60,000 students. There was also a great increase in Indian non-Government aided colleges and schools. From 11 such colleges in 1882, these expanded to 53 colleges in 1902 with 5,800 students.[11] Literacy classes and night schools were also established in India by the British in the nineteenth century. William Adams in 1836–7 claimed only 6% literacy; and in its last 25 years the East India Company

tended to disregard indigenous systems of education and 'import to the native population a knowledge of English, a knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language'. Here, as elsewhere in British India, the essentially elitist strategy of the colonial power was apparent. Thus, education was to be used primarily as a means of training a new class of professionals to run the imperial system.

During the late nineteenth century the British established adult education provision in most of the major urban centres, but, in the great vastness of rural India, little attempt at adult education development was made. The Indian Education Commission of 1882–3 reported that in Bombay there were 134 night schools with almost 4,000 students, with 223 in the southern division of the presidency with almost 5,000 students. In addition, there were 1,000 adult classes in Bengal (rising to 1,587 by 1896–7) and 312 in Madras.

Three important and related points should be made here. The system that evolved in these years was closely modelled on the British, not only in its curriculum content and ideological orientation, but also in its hierarchical and elitist structures. A small number of universities was created in the nineteenth century (initially, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay in 1857), all on the British model. These formed the 'apex of the educational pyramid in each region ... the Universities exercised a decisive authority over the teaching in the colleges and schools that lay within their ambits.'[12] They determined the curriculum, the priorities and the overall direction of all other forms of education. Secondly, despite Wood's intentions, it soon became evident that 'practically all the institutions of higher education used English as the medium of instruction and aimed at the spread of Western knowledge and science.'[13] Thus the expansion of Indian education strongly reinforced the cultural imposition of British ideological values and substantive curriculum content at all levels. A new Indian middle class, steeped in veneration for things British, was created in these years. 'For most of British India the University system with all its shortcomings symbolised the high promise of British civilisation to a decadent, impoverished, caste-ridden people.'[14] Thirdly, despite this rapid growth the numbers involved were only a tiny proportion of the total population and were also confined almost exclusively to the great urban centres. With a population in the late 1880s which was estimated at almost 200 million, only 1 person in 3,300 had experience of secondary education, and only 1 in 22,000 experience in

college or higher education.

It was the creation of a new, educated, indigenous middle class in India in this period which provided one of the key elements in the Indian nationalist movement and, ultimately, in the Congress Party that was to dominate Indian society and culture in the period leading up to Independence in 1947. Before reviewing educational development in the twentieth century, therefore, we should look in more detail at the nature of this new middle class and the ways in which its socio-economic and cultural context gave rise to what became a vociferously nationalist and anti-British movement. A starting point is to note that, contrary to British intentions and subsequent statements, the Government education system was confined largely to the Hindu population. The Moslems increasingly organised their own educational provision (and the Christian missionary societies also energetically developed their own structures through the nineteenth century, with a naturally strong emphasis upon Christian evangelism). From the outset, the Moslems found the Eurocentrism of the Governmental structures alien and unacceptable. The growing separation of the educational structure between the two communities thus presaged the disastrous divisions which were to ensue at the time of Independence and beyond. The Hindus who became involved in the new educational structure were predominantly from the middle ranks of the caste system. Very few of the wealthy, 'aristocratic' sections of Indian society took part in these developments.

The nationalist movement that emerged from these origins was thus very much a *trahison des clercs*. Not that the majority of the educated cadres in fact became clerks: 'despite a widely prevalent view to the contrary the great majority of graduates were to be found in the professions rather than in the public service.'[15] These included law, medicine, civil engineering and education. One of the key legacies of the elite English model of education is thus immediately apparent. The Indian educational system, like the British, produced predominantly *arts* educated students who aspired to professional or service occupations rather than technological or productive roles. The result was to produce the painful paradox of an increasing number of relatively highly educated Indians unable to find suitable employment, in a sub-continent desperately short of trained and qualified (or even basically literate and numerate) human resources. As the number of such educated Indians grew year by year so 'the struggle for lucrative positions grew ever more

arduous.'[16] From this situation there arose, as McCully puts it, 'an educated class, talented and capable, ambitious to achieve, but frustrated by bureaucratic selfishness and the failure of those in high places'[17] to provide openings into the higher echelons of Anglo-Indian society. It was from this frustrated and increasingly disillusioned group that the movement for Indian nationalism grew in the early twentieth century. (It is interesting to note that a very similar analysis of the French events of 1968 was made by Regis Debray.)

The British Raj became aware of these problems in the last years of the nineteenth century. Lord Curzon became, in 1898, the twenty-fourth Governor-General of British India and immediately identified education as a priority policy area. 'Curzon believed that the first and foremost cause of political unrest in India was "the education we have given to the people of the country"; his education reforms were also politically motivated.'[18] Curzon's first target was the reform of the universities to bring them under greater direct control of the British Government by reforming radically the composition and size of university senates. The worst fears of the Indian radicals were not justified, however. In each of the senates the Indian members constituted a 'working majority' over the Europeans (for example, Calcutta had 41 Europeans and 43 Indians, and Bombay 41 Europeans and 59 Indians). In effect, Curzon's attempt to control the universities was unsuccessful.

A similar pattern was true also of the attempts to control secondary education. Curzon, and later Hardinge, tried to bring schools under Government control. The 1913 Education Policy resolution and University Bill, for example, advocated bringing the schools wholly under the control of the Education Department. These proposals were seen by Indian radicals in Bengal as 'taking away from the Universities the right to recognise schools and to replace the matriculation with a school final examination ... (which) would cripple the sphere of activity at Calcutta University.'[19] As had been the case earlier with Curzon's attempts to bring the schools under Government control, Hardinge backed down and withdrew the bill. 'Despite Government efforts, recognition of schools continued, except in a few instances, to be a power vested in the Universities ... Measures to keep students out of politics also proved ineffective.'[20] Indeed, the first stirrings of the Gandhian nationalist campaigns, involving students, took place in the early 1920s.

The British Government realised the dangers of these failures. The measures of control they proposed could have been imposed had sufficient conviction and force been available and used. Autocratic rulers like Curzon did not lack conviction; nor did they have any moral or political misgivings about explicitly imperialist rule and the suppression of Indian freedom. However, by the early years of the twentieth century it was already evident that the British Raj had neither the military and social control forces, nor the political and ideological hegemony, to ensure the long-term viability of imperial rule.

By the time Curzon became Governor-General, the British had come to think that vernacular education for the mass was at least as important as the Anglicist, elite education, particularly given the experience of nationalist sentiments amongst the latter. The 1913 Resolution on Education Policy emphasised the importance of vernaculars. Despite this, according to the English rulers, there was initially little demand from the indigenous population, which wanted instead English education, seeing this as an entry route to the social hierarchy. However, 'from the initial, almost blind, admiration (for English education) the attitude of many Indians to English had turned to one of growing dissatisfaction.'[21] But vested interests, and the scale of the resources needed for proper, mass provision, determined that no real progress was made.

Growing alongside the largely unsuccessful moves towards vernacular education was the determination of Curzon and his successors to change the emphasis in education so that technical education enjoyed equality of esteem and resourcing with the traditional liberal arts education imported from Britain.[22] Curzon intended to devote resources to basic technical education for the masses, not higher technical education for the elite; but progress was very slow indeed. Much of this was due to the inherent conservatism of the Governmental structure of the Raj; but much was also the result of the bureaucratic and parsimonious policy and processes of the home Government in Britain. Thus, for example, the India Council in Britain opposed the introduction of free primary education in 1911–12, and it also rejected Hardinge's proposal for a major grant for technical education. (In Curzon's view, the whole apparatus for governing India was 'a mighty and miraculous machine for doing nothing.')[23]

Despite all these problems, education expanded markedly in India in the early twentieth century. By 1920 the total number of

pupils and students in education was approximately four million: double the number 15 years earlier. In 1898 there were five universities: in 1922, 12. Between 1896 and 1922 the number of arts colleges increased from 115 to 152, and the number of students from 13,933 to 45,224. Perhaps most striking of all, given India's poverty and backwardness economically, was the relatively high number of graduates. By 1920, 0.25 per cent of India's population had received a university education, compared with 0.54 per cent in England and Wales.

This growth, though, took place on the foundations of the largely *laissez-faire* system established by the British in the nineteenth century, and concentrated upon Anglicist, arts-based curriculum and approaches, and a 'top-down' elitist system. The attempt to introduce wholesale Government control of education over the whole sub-continent, initiated by Curzon and pursued by his successors, was unsuccessful. This was due partly to logistics, partly to the lack of adequate resources, partly to Governmental conservatism, but above all to the declining political power of the British Raj through the early years of the twentieth century.

> *Indeed, the great interest taken by the Government in education and its fear of the political potential of the educated classes was itself, in a sense, an indication of (the British Raj's) loss of power ... The seemingly autocratic British Raj was by this time neither omnipotent nor omnicompetent.*[24]

What then, finally, was the role of adult education in this process in the period under review? In the nineteenth century, adult education *per se* received virtually no attention. As Nurullah and Naik point out, although there had been 'a few night-schools (in the) very early days ... these were primary schools conducted at night rather than adult classes proper.'[25] These were concerned exclusively with the most basic literacy instruction and were attended by male labourers. The 1882–3 Commission found most evidence of such provision in Bombay (3,919 adults attending 134 vernacular night-schools), and recommended that such provision should be encouraged elsewhere. Although examples are to be found in succeeding years, 'very few practical steps were taken to develop the movement' and, 'between 1902 and 1917, the movement declined still further'.[26]

In 1919 the Government introduced the Government of India Act, which in effect devolved considerable responsibilities to the

provinces and to Indian officials and politicians. The Act created a 'diarchy', or rule of two, whereby the Governor, as head of the provisional Government, was responsible for certain reserved departments, and in conjunction with the appropriate ministers was responsible to a provincial legislature with a large elected majority for the transferred Departments. It was under this rather cumbersome system, which was of course a move towards power-sharing between the British Raj and the indigenous population, that Indians first obtained control of the Education Department. And it was in this new context that adult education, in the form of a coherent plan for literacy programmes, became a significant part of educational provision in the years from 1921 onwards.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this brief discussion of the years prior to 1920 is perhaps that British education in India reflected the fractured ideological structure of the domestic practice. Liberal educational principles were, in Britain and India alike, contradictory in their advocacy of both elitism and hierarchy, and free-thinking and radicalism. Moreover, in the Indian context, the British approach with its contradictory ideological stance, was often ill-fitted to the objective needs of the people, and led to unintended consequences, the most dramatic of which was the rise of Indian nationalism. In this sense, education in India in this period can only be understood in the wider political context. Given its inability to have much effect on the masses, its importance lay in its role in informing the embryonic nationalist movement, which was itself the 'cumulative result of the total impact of British rule, economic, social and political'.[27] The nationalists were of course instrumental in achieving independence from the colonial power, but they never came near achieving liberation for the masses, either educationally or socially. The nationalist movement was thus at one level the ideological product of colonialist education, the principal difference being that it wanted to replace the colonial government with nationalist, home rule.[28] In this important sense, education had a pivotal role to play in the 'process of nation-building'[29] which began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and reached full fruition in the years leading up to 1947.

From the early 1920s Indian education in general came increasingly under the control of the Indian governmental system, both national and provincial. The fairly rapid relinquishing by the British of their control of education mirrored their general realisation that increasing autonomy for India, if not full independence,

was inevitable. Provincial governments were given far greater freedom 'to plan programmes of educational expansion and improvements'.[30] Several initiatives were undertaken and grants to education were increased. Recruitment to the national Indian Educational Service was discontinued and each province assumed responsibility for its own provision, and the control of the national government 'over the details of administration came to an end.'[31]

There was a strong emphasis upon education as a means of developing national consciousness. Lala Lajpat Rai, for example, in a book published in 1920, stated that Indian education should be 'controlled by Indians, shaped by Indians, carried on by Indians. *It must hold up Indian ideals of devotion, wisdom and morality, and must be permeated by the Indian religious spirit ...*' (original emphasis).[32] The majority of the provinces soon became dominated by Congress, thus underlining the nationalist orientations in education, as in other spheres of social and political life.

Despite the difficulties of world recession in the 1920s and 1930s, which had its effects in India as elsewhere, the steady expansion of general educational activity continued. Although Indian ministers in the provinces were unable to obtain sufficient funding for their initial grandiose educational plans, the pressure for educational improvements resulted in the establishment in 1928 of the Hartog Committee (as an auxiliary to the Royal Commission on India chaired by Sir John Simon). The Hartog Committee produced wide-ranging proposals for the development of both general and vocational education, stressing that they were of equal importance: 'If general education brings about the development of the non-material culture of a country, vocational education does the same thing for material culture. Hence, both are necessary for the progress of a country.'[33] British readers will recognise this as a long-standing and prominent debate in their own continuing education context – not least in the 1990s!

Congress politicians were acutely aware, in the 1930s, of the need for the provision of universal, free and compulsory primary education. On the other hand, they also realised that it was impossible, or certainly politically unacceptable, to raise the necessarily large sum of money to finance this expansion through additional taxation. It was this conundrum which lead to Gandhi's radical proposals, originally published as a series of articles in *Harijan* in 1937. These in turn led to the First Congress of National Education at Wardha in October 1937. Gandhi's basic idea was for education

to become self-supporting through craft, agricultural and other productive work, thereby by-passing potentially the need for government funding support. (Of course, Gandhi's proposals were not based entirely upon financial considerations but reflected also his wider ideological distaste for governmental, bureaucratic control of education, and his advocacy of an anti-industrial, rural, craft-based educational structure. This is discussed in Chapter 2 in the context of Gandhi's overall educational ideas.)

During this same period, larger allocations were made for educational development, and plans for the introduction of compulsory primary education, and for the elimination of illiteracy, were introduced. The late 1930s was a period of great activism and expansion in Indian education. However, all these developments were suddenly cut short by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. The early 1940s were thus years 'of marking time when no new educational schemes were undertaken ...'[34] After the end of the war in 1945, the last two years before the final granting of Independence in 1947 were so taken up with wider issues of political and social concern that little progress was made in educational reform and development.

Within this overall educational context, adult education played an increasingly important role. There were two main and interrelated aims of adult education strategy: to improve literacy levels in both rural and urban areas, and to instil a sense of community and national identity in the Indian masses. The flavour of the inter-war period is well caught by the Report of the Adult Education Committee in Bombay in 1938:

> *By 'Adult Education' we mean (1) the education of the illiterate at all stages; and (2) the further education of literates at any stage and in any direction ... We are dividing Adult Education work into two parts; (1) that which centres around literacy, including the preparatory ground-work and the subsequent follow-up work, both in rural and urban areas; and (2) Adult Education as it is commonly understood in the West – that education which the adult seeks for himself or herself in the civilised community for supplementing an imperfect education and for extending and enriching the possibilities of life. Because of the peculiar conditions prevailing in India, we are not stressing the second type of Adult Education ... Throughout the Report we emphasise the paramount importance* for the present *of literacy and the rural problem(emphasis in original).*[35]

Later, the Report stresses the importance of adult education in individual and collective social development, again beginning with literacy work. Adult education 'will thus be seen to have a very prominent place in any programme looking forward to building up and organising a strong and efficient democracy.'[36]

In the 1920s literacy work began to develop significantly. In 1921–2, for example, the Punjab government made specific provision for literacy for the first time. By 1926–7 there were 3,984 literacy schools, with almost 100,000 adults attending.[37] Similar developments took place in other northern and central areas of India, Bombay and Bengal for example. There was also considerable development of links with the co-operative movement. The Royal Commission on Agriculture noted that 'there has been an intimate connection between the literacy movement and the Co-operative Department. The department starts the schools and when their success is assured, they are handed over to the Education Department.'[38] This in turn was linked to the beginning, in the modern period, of Adult Education's involvement with the voluntary sector, in addition to its formal, governmental structures and financing.

The period from the late 1920s to the late 1930s was one of decline for adult education, as a result of the global recession, although the widespread development of the library system did something to compensate for the falling-off in literacy provision. In 1937, the formation of popular ministries gave both a new orientation and a new impetus to mass literacy campaigns which were launched, on a large scale, in several provinces. From now on, adult education provision also included 'in theory at least, citizenship education.'[39]

From this provincial base, the literacy 'movement' became a national phenomenon in 1938, when the Central Advisory Board of Education appointed a committee to consider the question of adult education. In May 1940 the main recommendations were submitted to the Board. They included the need to develop mass literacy and to keep adults literate, the desirability of co-operation between statutory and voluntary sectors, the importance of using mass media and ensuring teacher training, and the need for central government to provide financial assistance to provincial governments for adult education programmes. These principles were accepted by the Board (although, as so often in the history of adult education in India, relatively little seems to have been done to turn

rhetorical commitment into reality). The Board collected, via the Educational Commissioner, details of provincial progress in adult education. The results showed considerable development in almost all areas in literacy work and in library provision. Bengal provides a typical example. In 1939 there were 10,000 classes with an enrolment of 150,000. By 1942 the number of classes had risen to 22,547 with an enrolment of 530,000. The number of public libraries had similarly increased to more than 700. The *forms* of provision varied greatly from state to state, ranging from *vidyapeeths* on the Danish High School model (at Mysore, for example), to the creation of a comprehensive Education Expansion Department in United Provinces, with 20 full-time teachers in each district moving from one village to the next only when a whole community was completely literate. Other important innovations in adult education development included the Indian army's adult education programme, begun in 1921, which enabled large numbers of soldiers not only to become literate but also to gain certification. As indicated earlier, all these government-inspired adult education developments were aimed particularly at increasing literacy and numeracy levels in order to provide adequately trained labour power for administering British India. As is always the case, however, educational provision geared towards instrumental and hegemonic objectives produced other consequences. As more Indians became educated and as the independence movement grew, so the interaction increased between education ('knowledge is power') and politics (the rising tide of anti-colonial feeling and Indian nationalism).

Nationally, adult education via the army, which had begun in 1921, expanded rapidly during the World War II years. Citizenship, as well as literacy education, was emphasised; and of course the war aims, as construed by the British, became a central feature of the curriculum. According to S.C. Dutta, 'the period 1937–42, witnessed a gigantic increase in the stature of Adult Education in India.'[40] Certainly, the statistical evidence shows a significant growth of activity: between 1931 and 1941 a 70% increase in literacy was recorded. And the creation in 1938 of the Indian Adult Education Association was indicative of its 'coming of age', as was the founding of the *Indian Journal of Adult Education* in 1940. Similarly, the 1944 Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education stated that 'comprehensive arrangements (for Adult Education development) should form an integral part of any national system of education ... Literacy is a means not an end in it-

self. Although the main emphasis in the beginning may be placed on the liquidation of illiteracy, Adult Education in the full sense must be provided for those already literate.'[41]

Although the war years saw a decline of activity in adult education as in education generally, because of the wider concerns and the inevitable squeeze on resources, adult education 'never again (lost) its respectability'[42] nor its place in the national educational system, nor, equally important, in the Government's consciousness. Adult education had thus become sufficiently well-established, with its own infrastructure and political solidity, to assume a prominent role in post-Independence India after 1947.

This brief contextual sketch of general education development in India, and the place of adult education within this framework, has illustrated several themes which persist throughout this study. Firstly, education was a highly *contested* arena. From disputes over Anglicist versus Oriental perspectives, through to general curriculum issues, educational policy was debated in explicitly political terms. Secondly, the tensions over national as against provincial, as well as British as opposed to Indian, perspectives and control, also persisted throughout the twentieth century. Thirdly, the perception of education as a means of imperial control, through vanguard socialisation, again persisted in various forms throughout the period. This is particularly evident in the continuing discussions over whether adult education should be concerned exclusively with literacy or should also encompass citizenship education – and, if the latter, how this was to be defined ideologically.

All these issues demonstrate that educational policy and provision in general, and perhaps in India in particular, have been permeated by ideological assumptions and objectives. These dimensions of education have continued, and indeed in some ways have become even more prominent, since 1947, as will be analysed and discussed in subsequent chapters.

Notes

1. See B.T. McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (Peter Smith, 1966).
2. F.W. Thomas, *The History and Prospects of British Education in India* (Cambridge University Press, 1891), p. 15.
3. S.C. Dutta, *History of Adult Education in India* (New Dehli: Indian Adult Education Association, 1988), p. 3.
4. See S. Nurullah and J.P. Naik, *A History of Education in India During the British Period* (Macmillan, 1951).
5. *ibid.*, p. 52.
6. C. Grant, 'Observations on the state of society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to morals, and on the means of improving it,' *Parliamentary Papers, 1831–1832*, vol. viii (734), 1792, general appendix 60, quoted in McCully, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
7. A. Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898–1920* (Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 1.
8. Quoted, in McCully, 1966, p. 69.
9. C. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India* (1839), quoted in McCully, 1966.
10. McCully, 1966, p. 139.
11. Statistics taken from McCully, 1966, Nurullah and Naik,1951 and Basu, 1974.
12. McCully, 1966, p. 167.
13. Nurullah and Naik 1951, p. xviii.
14. McCully, 1966, p. 174.
15. *ibid.*, p. 191.
16. *ibid.*, p. 193.
17. *ibid.*, p. 202.
18. Basu, 1974, p. 9. The quotation given is from L. Fraser, *India under Curzon and After*, 1911, p. 181.
19. *ibid.*, p. 55.
20. *ibid.*, pp. 56–7.
21. *ibid.*, p. 77.
22. As far back as the 1880s, the Education Commission had recommended such developments, but to little effect.

23. Letter from Lord Curzon to George Hamilton, 1902, quoted in Basu, 1974, p. 95.
24. *ibid.*, p. 230.
25. Nurullah and Naik, 1951, p. 741.
26. *ibid.*, pp. 742–3.
27. Basu, 1974, pp. 234–5.
28. This is well-represented by Ranjit Guha, an exponent of contemporary, radical Indian historiography. 'There are several versions of this (elitist) historiography, but the central modality common to them is to describe Indian nationalism as a sort of learning process through which the native elite became involved in politics by trying to negotiate the maze of institutions and the corresponding cultural complex introduced by the colonial authorities in order to govern the country. What made the elite go through this process was, according to this historiography, no lofty idealism addressed to the general good of the nation but simply the expectation of rewards in the form of a share in the wealth, power and prestige created by and associated with colonial rule; and it was the drive for such rewards with all its concomitant play of collaboration and competition between the ruling power and the native elite as well as between various elements among the latter themselves, which, we are told, was what constituted Indian nationalism'. Ranjit Guha, 'On some aspects of the historiography of Colonial India', in R. Guha and G.C. Spivak, eds, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Oxford, 1983, p. 38.
29. Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India*, p. 236.
30. Nurullah and Naik, 1951, p. xxi.
31. *ibid.*
32. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Problem of National Education in India*, 1920, quoted in A. Biswas and J.P. Agrawal, *The Development of Education in India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1986), p. 45.
33. Hartog Report, quoted in Biswas and Agrawal, 1986, p. 54.
34. Nurullah and Naik, 1951, p. xxii.
35. Introductory Note, Chapter 1, *Report of the Adult Education Committee* (Bombay, 1938), p. 1.
36. *ibid.*, p. 5.
37. Dutta, 1988, p. 31.

38. *ibid.*, p. 32.
39. *ibid.*, p. 35.
40. *ibid.*, pp. 48–9.
41. Quoted in Biswas and Agrawal, 1986, p. 66
42. Dutta, 1988, p. 52.

Chapter 2

Gandhi and the Dialectic of Modernity

Since independence in 1947, Indian adult education has been dominated by an ideology of modernisation. Inspired by Western socialist ideas, Nehru and his successors saw education as one of the key tools for transforming a backward, illiterate and predominantly rural society into a modern, industrial and materially productive national state. The alternative Indian educational perspectives of importance came from Gandhi and Tagore. Although ultimately incompatible with national policy, Gandhi's educational programme and arguments remain of considerable importance, for two inter-related reasons. Gandhi's general influence was so important a factor – symbolically as much as actually – in the course of Indian independence that his views on any aspect of Indian society are of interest. Secondly, because of Gandhi's coherent and in some respects extreme anti-colonialism, his educational philosophy is a part of a general ideological position which was fundamentally opposed to the culture, structures and practices of British colonial rule.

Gandhi's ideas on adult education cannot be separated from his ideas on education as a whole. He viewed education in a wholly political way, in that he saw educational theory and practice as central to the life or death struggle of India (and other subject, colonial peoples) against Western industrial civilisation. He was opposed root and branch to the values embodied in and proselytised by mainstream Western society, as he argued in his most important writing on education, *Hind Swaraj* (1906), to which he remained faithful until the end.[1] But Gandhi also pragmatically advocated the need for retaining practical elements of Western education. For example, his biographer notes that as late as 1908, 'he argued that an English education, including study of English and the Sciences, was essential in the contemporary world. Without it they would be crippled and backward'.[2] Education was viewed by

Nehru and the nationalists primarily as vocational training to provide an increasingly skilled workforce to facilitate greater industrial progress and thus material welfare. This was anathema to Gandhi, who was opposed on fundamental philosophical grounds to Western capitalism's culture of selfish, individualistic materialism. For him, the machine culture of industrial capitalism threatened to destroy human spirituality and distract humanity from its rightful concerns of truth-seeking and communal, non-violent, harmonious social living. Gandhi was thus implacably opposed to developing an education system in India that was geared to replicating Western 'progress'. At its most extreme Gandhi's position was that:

> *Modern civilisation represents forces of evil and darkness whereas the ancient, Indian civilisation represents in it essence the divine force. Modern civilisation is chiefly materialistic, as ours is chiefly spiritual. Modern civilisation occupies itself in the investigation of the laws of matter, and employs the human ingenuity in inventing and discovering means of production and weapons of destruction; ours is chiefly occupied in the discovery of spiritual laws ... Our civilisation tells us with daring certainty that a proper and perfect cultivation of the quality of ahimsa, which in its active form means purest love and pity, brings the whole world to our feet.*[3]

As Krishna Kumar put it, Gandhi located the 'problem of education in (the) dialectic ... of man versus machine.'[4] The British system had created a rift between the educated elite, which was largely urban, and the massive rural population. The main effect of village education was that the educated villagers left the rural areas and went to work in the towns as clerks or other functionaries. Villages were thus systematically deprived of their potential leadership cadres.

Nor were these Gandhi's only criticisms. He also rejected the abstract and arts basis of Western education. For Gandhi the real business of education was 'learning how to control the senses, and acquiring an ethical basis to life. Character-building, not the acquisition of a foreign language or irrelevant knowledge, was the need for India's millions'.[5] Although Gandhi did not develop his campaign for Basic Education programmes until the late 1930s the elements of his approach to education were clear by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Education, both for children

and for adults, should concentrate upon 'character-training rather than accumulation of knowledge, vernaculars as opposed to English, and learning through practical skills rather than book-based study.'[6]

It was Gandhi's conviction that the Congress movement was dominated by Western-oriented, socialist, modernising politicians that led him to give a new and urgent priority to education based upon rural India. Only through grass-roots reconstruction in the villages could a viable, independent and free India be created. Gandhi believed that the key to India's future lay in the villages, in rural India, and not in the towns.

The Wardha Scheme

Gandhi's system of Basic Education was outlined at the Wardha National Education Conference of 1937 in the following way:

1. There should be free compulsory education for seven years for all children on a national scale.
2. The medium of instruction should be the mother tongue.
3. The education should centre on manual and productive work and all other abilities to be taught should be related to the central handicraft.
4. The education should be self-financing through the production of some necessary material item like *khadi* which could pay the cost of the teacher and materials.

The Wardha conference was a direct response to the India Act of 1935, which, although not inaugurated until 1937, transferred substantial governmental power to eight of India's 11 provinces. Gandhi saw this as the opportunity to reconstruct the British system, which he believed had served the Indian people so poorly, by constructing an anti-imperialist strategy which anathematised, rhetorically at least, 'Western' educational aims. Gandhi proposed that in the place of the British primary and secondary stratification of education there should be one continuous schooling of at least seven years which should be called 'Basic Education' or *nai telim*. Whatever else followed would be based on this foundation. Gandhi believed that the artificial divisions imposed by the British system of primary and secondary education were both socially and person-

ally divisive. Not only did secondary education depend on a rough division of children by social class but it broke the organic continuity of learning for the children themselves. He proposed that Basic Education should therefore be both universal and continuous – a lifelong education.

Education should be clearly related to the needs of Indian independence and autonomy, to recognise her cultural difference from both the West and Soviet Communism through the importance of maintaining the traditional practices of everyday Indian life. Central to this was a doctrine of non-violence:

> *If we want to eliminate communal strife, and international strife, we must start with foundations pure and strong by rearing our younger generation on the education I have adumbrated. The plan springs out of non-violence ... We have to make our boys (sic) true representatives of our culture, our civilisation, of the true genius of our nation. Europe is no example to us. It plans its programmes in terms of violence because it believes in violence. I would be the last to minimise the achievements of Russia, but the whole structure is based on force and violence. If India had resolved to eschew violence, this system of education becomes an integral part of the discipline.*[7]

This clear signalling of educational value in the shape of non-violence underlined the importance for Gandhi of maintaining Indian independence of all political systems based on violence and thus claimed a kind of non-religious secular spirituality. The aims of education were to promote a society based on common interest and equality, inspired by the values of solidarity, democracy and non-doctrinal learning.

Though opposed diametrically to Bolshevised Marxism, Gandhi nevertheless believed in the centrality of labour to the process of self-knowledge and understanding (although he may well have relied more on Ruskin than Marx for this understanding). Basic Education placed the learning of a craft at the centre of the system and stressed the importance of common productivity. Zakir Hussain, who chaired the drafting committee, noted that the scheme was above all designed to produce 'workers', but not as mere extensions of the machine. He proposed that education should produce workers who looked upon all kinds of useful work as honourable and who desired to be self-sufficient rather than dependent on society or the state for a living. 'Thus the

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new scheme which we are advocating will aim at giving the citizens of the future a keen sense of personal worth, dignity and efficiency and the desire for self-improvement and social service in a co-operative community'.[8] Hussain saw Basic Education as based on a triadic relation between the physical and social environment in which craft work was pivotal, so that through the reflexive learning of a craft the student would begin to grasp the relations between himself and the broader social world.

Gandhi, who also believed that British arts education was positively harmful in that it bore no relation to lived experience, insisted that all learning was to be related to experience rather than based on abstract principles. Information or ideas which bore no relation to personal experience were, he believed, useless and quickly forgotten. Mechanical rote learning was equally useless. Instead, the curriculum should be problem-centred and should encompass the actual personal and social difficulties the child would meet in everyday life, enabling him or her to react intelligently to new conditions. The curriculum laid stress on self-activity, in the belief that unless the child was gripped by the learning project and its outcome he would not accept the enterprise as his own. Stimulated in this way, the child would develop the spirit of scientific inquiry. It may be important to note here that Gandhi was not opposed to this aspect of scientificity, which encouraged intelligent activity on the part of the student rather than passive assimilation of information, although he was opposed to the uses to which scientific inquiry had been put by the British and other imperialist nations.

Similarly, Gandhi was not opposed to the idea of social progress as such and saw it as a goal. However, he did not encourage competitive individualism, another unpleasant imperialist import, and instead insisted that genuine social progress had to be based on co-operative action, which thus became a curricular emphasis.

Basic Education was to contain a number of major curricular elements: craft learning, mother-tongue tuition, maths, social studies, general science and music and drama. Craft learning was to be the primary element upon which everything else hinged. Moreover, it had to be a basic craft which should equip a child with a means for independent occupation within a known social and geographical context. Clearly, spinning and the production of *khadi* would be taught in cotton-growing areas, fruit and vegetable growing in producing areas, pottery in clay areas, carpentry in the for-

ests and agricultural cultivation in farming areas. However, it was crucial that the craft should not be taught in a mechanical fashion as a series of physical movements unrelated to intellectual application. 'The teaching of the craft should', Gandhi argued,

> *be a medium of education not just vocational training. Craft teaching ... should be the means of intellectual training ... A carpenter teaches me carpentry. I shall learn it mechanically from him and as a result I shall know the use of various tools but that will hardly develop my intellect. But if the same thing is taught to me by someone who has taken a scientific training in carpentry, he will stimulate my intellect too. Not only shall I then have become an expert carpenter, but also an engineer. For, the expert will have taught me mathematics, also told me the difference between different kinds of timber, the place where they come from, giving me thus a knowledge of geography and also a little of agriculture.*[9]

The mother tongue would have to replace English as the medium for instruction because the neglect of local languages by the British had had the effect of increasingly alienating Indians from their own culture. Gandhi, romantically, regarded the mother tongue as a reservoir of the accumulated hopes and aspirations as well as the wisdom of the people. Learning it would inspire pride in the historic achievement of the people and in their traditions and culture. It was also proposed that Hindustani should replace English as the language of administration and government.

Pride in traditional culture, however, was to be complemented by a modernist third element of the curriculum, social studies, which aimed to make Indians aware of the injustice and privilege inherent in many of the old ways. They would concentrate on the non-violent solution to these problems in the context of learning about democracy and citizenship. Emphasis would be laid on the ideals of love, truth and justice, co-operative endeavour, national solidarity and the equality of the 'brotherhood of man'. Nationalism would also be celebrated and encouraged but in a non-arrogant and non-exclusive way so as not to foster sentiments of xenophobia and intolerance of foreigners. Within social studies, geography would also be taught but again in a reflexive way, so as to encourage an ecological understanding of, and relationship with, the land. Civics, too, would be taught, though not with the intention of creating only passive servants of the state, but rather instilling the no-

tion of citizenship, involving human and democratic rights. Schools should as far as possible echo the new republic by becoming self-governing institutions with democratically elected parliaments. A decisive rupture with tradition was that there would be no religious instruction of any kind, this being regarded as a private matter, and a safeguard against the possible inter-communal bigotry and violence which Gandhi, with some prescience, envisaged as a major social danger within the future independent India.

General science and maths were also curricular elements in Gandhi's schema. The same reflexivity applied there too and the emphasis would be on experiment and faith in the scientific method as a way of discovering the truth. The curriculum would contain elements of nature study, botany, zoology, physiology, hygiene, physical culture and chemistry, all of which would be taught in relation to the basic craft and the everyday needs of the child. Pedagogically, it stressed the value of work disciplines and the importance of students being given real work in a school context, which would give them a sense of reality. Work would make them purposeful and develop habits of critical enquiry, since it was thought to develop moral qualities of self-discipline, co-operative activity, endurance of hardship, and the value of order. Not the least value of work was that it would provide an income for the child's family, who might not otherwise agree to sending children to school. Privileged classes would learn the value of labour while the mass of the people would learn increased control through understanding. Basic Education would be

> *the spearhead of a silent social revolution fraught with the most far-reaching consequences. It will provide a healthy and moral basis of relationship between the city and the village and thus go a long way towards eradicating some of the worst evils of the present social insecurity and poisoned relationship between the classes ... And all this would be accomplished without the horrors of a bloody class war.*[10]

Thus, in summary, the scheme proposed by Gandhi at Wardha was one which gave education a purposively social orientation which aimed at developing children as citizens of a society based on non-violence and co-operation. It was also a profoundly practical education which focused unashamedly on the needs of the emergent independent India conceived as a primarily rural society. Gandhi believed that Beauty would follow Truth: 'Whatever is

useful to the starving millions is beautiful to my mind. Let us give today the vital things of life, and all the graces and ornaments of life will follow'.[11]

The first Basic experimental school was founded at Sevagram in autumn 1938 under Gandhi's supervision and allowing no distinction between caste, creed or sex; competition was not encouraged. The children would learn about nature from nature, about cotton production, spinning and cloth making, responsibility for equipment, cleanliness and practical hygiene, arithmetic from counting threads, and reading and writing. There was also to be dyeing and weaving, carpentry to make equipment, maths and geometry for accounts and scientific principles of spinning. Vegetables were to be grown for the community and education given in food and diets. Sevagram ran training courses for teachers which lasted nine months in which they had to master spinning and Hindustani. The school was run as a democratic body with ministers elected from the students at monthly elections. Self-expression was encouraged through painting and dancing and the great festivals of all religions were celebrated, with village people joining in. Through the Kasturba Trust (named after Gandhi's wife) the role education of women was emphasised: this included maternity and child-care, personal care and family maintenance. The aim was to draw together all aspects of education and work into a multi-purpose, co-operative society.

An important element of Gandhi's Basic Education scheme was his insistence that all developments should be self-supporting financially, and autonomous. There were, as always with Gandhi, practical reasons for this: a poor society like India could not afford to resource, from the public purse, the huge programme he envisaged. However, the less obvious ideological reason was that Gandhi was deeply opposed to state financing and thus state control of education. One of the guiding political principles of Gandhi's life generally was opposition to the coercive state, and an assertion of decentralised, autonomous and free political structures. In many senses Gandhi was an anarchist; hence his admiration for Tolstoy, for example.[12] For Gandhi, truth and non-violence were the essential values, and dependence upon the state negated both. He adhered to the anarchist precept that 'war is the health of the state'. A state system of education was thus a contradiction of Gandhi's view of education. As Kumar has noted,[13] Gandhi's idea of productive schools was clearly based upon his experience in

South Africa, where he had established Phoenix Farm in 1904 and Tolstoy Farm in 1910. There is, in fact, a close correlation between Gandhi's ideological position and that of Western romantic, anti-industrial, humanist and libertarian thinkers: Ruskin, Tolstoy, Carpenter and Dewey, for example.

What we can see in Gandhi's ideological formation is nothing so simple as a rejection of Western ideas as such or pan-Orientalism. His debt to a number of Western thinkers who inhabit what Raymond Williams defined as a romantic critique of capitalism is generously acknowledged within his writing. Gandhi's innovation was in integrating this critique within an anti-imperialist struggle and in imagining a holistic post-colonial society freed from Victorian capitalism. The tragedy was that he could not persuade the modernising nationalists of this vision. His visit to Britain in the 1880s and his discovery of Ruskin's *Unto this Last* in South Africa introduced him to a social 'formation' within which a cultural politics was quite strongly developed. Strongly sympathetic to orientalism, it took an interest in Buddhism but was especially attracted to the Hindu epics. It was within this group in 1887, for example, that Gandhi discovered Edwin Arnold's English translation of the Hindu classic, *Bhagavad Gita*, read it with friends and studied it seriously for the first time.[14] Later, he noted that Arnold's *Light of India* re-presented India to him in ways other than those of the dominant colonial discourse.

A key organisation within this cultural formation was theosophy, which had been developed by Madame Blavatsky from dubious sources earlier in the century. It was in part a rejection of a spiritually moribund Anglicanism but also an affirmation of aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism conventionally rejected by Christian imperialists. Blavatsky insisted that the resulting mélange was not a new religion as such but the essence of all religions.[15] Gandhi met Blavatsky and her successor as leader of the theosophical movement, Annie Besant, at her salon in the late 1880s. He was attracted to theosophy precisely for the way it valued his own experience and affirmed his identity against the negative projections of the Christian imperialists. According to Gandhi, Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy* 'disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.'[16] He also read Besant's *How I Became a Theosophist*, which, he claimed, strengthened his own aversion to atheism. Nevertheless, although very interested in Annie Besant's conversion to theoso-

phy, Gandhi declined to join. During this time Besant's partner Charles Bradlaugh, the militant atheist, died. Such was his reputation among the Indian community, Gandhi recorded, that he and just about every Indian in London at the time attended his funeral. He later fell out with Besant but acknowledged that her role in the Indian Independence movement was very significant to him and the nationalists.

In London, therefore, Gandhi obtained an informal radical education not available to him through the British educational system in India. It was here that he became a vegetarian by reading Salt's book *A Plea for Vegetarianism* and discovered around the culture of theosophy a pantheon of thinkers such as Carlyle, Ruskin and also Tolstoy, whose anarchistic political works were then just being translated into English and popularised by an energetic Tolstoyan movement. Tolstoy made a profound impression on him. He was 'overwhelmed' by his *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, which left 'an abiding impression' on him.[17] He was impressed by its 'independent thinking, profound morality and truthfulness', against which all the other books he had been lent by his London friends paled into insignificance. Then as a result of his intensive study of *The Gospels in Brief* and other books he began to realise 'more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love'.[18] His reading of Tolstoy marked a turn towards the redemptive elements of the New Testament (as opposed to the punitive elements of the Old Testament, which was the more usual fare of Christian missionaries). The result was a remarkable effort of cultural assimilation: 'My young mind turned to unify the teachings of the *Gita*, *The Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly'.[19]

Gandhi assimilated Tolstoy's educational ideas to traditional Indian models of guru training and his Tolstoy farm in South Africa was in some respects a forerunner for his ashram ideal. The guru was an idea, however, that stayed with him throughout his European education, in part of course because that ideal had already been absorbed into the Western cultural critique by Western Orientalists and emerged in various forms in Western writing. Gandhi's single comment on what he found of value in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*, for example, is: 'I read the chapter on the Hero as prophet and learnt of the Prophet's greatness and bravery and austere living'.[20] Gandhi's admiration for Ruskin was not

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fully developed until South Africa. He was utterly gripped by *Unto this Last* on a 24-hour train journey from Johannesburg to Durban, a book which 'made me transform my life'.[21] So important was it that he made and published a Gujarati translation. Again, what impressed him was the nearness of Ruskin's ideas to his own.

> *The thoughts expressed in these letters (*Unto this Last*) are beautiful and resemble some of our own ideas, so much so that an outsider would think that the ideas which I set forth in my writings and which we try to put into practice in the Ashram, I had stolen from these letters of Ruskin.*[22]

He understood, he said, that the teachings of *Unto This Last* were that the good of the individual is the good of all and that the lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, especially the third principle, that the life of the labourer, the tiller of the soil or the craftsman, 'is the life worth living'.[23] In his assimilation of Ruskin's and other 'Western' ideas, then, Gandhi took only those which resonated with and confirmed his own.

It is clear, however, that some of these ideas were current among some of the more liberal Christian imperialists, as Studdart-Kennedy demonstrates. He identifies another cultural formation, which was valuing the work of Ruskin and others for its critique of Victorian capitalism. This formation, which in some ways overlapped with Gandhi's London friends, was that of Christian Socialism. He notes that Ruskin's *Unto this Last* also provided a vision of the good society sought by Christians, namely: 'a hierarchy of functional social orders integrated by the classless ideal of disinterested service'.[24] This emphasised a desire for a return to medieval and feudal corporatism which in many respects was much closer to the Indian experience.

These Christian imperialists voiced the ideology of the civilising mission in its most articulate form. They believed in the purposive evolution of history, of which the organic growth of British institutions was the advance guard. It was a form of Providentialism. Studdart-Kennedy notes that they took it for granted that 'it was the tradition of Christian belief and Christian values of social service and self-discipline, cherished in the great middle-class foundations and institutionalised in the machinery of imperial trusteeship, that was leading decayed civilisations away from their aberrant paths.'[25]

There was no doubt that although Gandhi had no time for the

more baroque elements of this ideology, he did pragmatically take some of this agenda on board. He had no sentimental attachment to the corrupt practices of the pre-colonial caste system or the more decadent elements of Hinduism which some called 'traditional culture'. As a consequence, Studdart-Kennedy argues, 'the religious component of British orientalism ... blended with more pragmatic responses to Gandhian nationalism'.[26] (This was despite Bishop Gore's comment on visiting the Oxford Mission in Calcutta, that the trouble with Gandhi 'as with all Indians, is that he is entirely uninterested in facts.')[27] Further, Gandhi shared an interest in Ruskin with those Christian Socialists who were beginning to take an active interest in popular and workers' education in Britain: 'Gandhi had read and identified with the Ruskin of *Unto This Last* and so had the last generation of 'Christian Socialists' as they looked for an organic solution to the problem of material inequality and class conflict'.[28]

Quite a complex relationship existed between progressive educational movements in both India and Britain emanating from this formation. Inspired by the philosopher T.H. Green's 'Christian Hegelianism', a group of Christian Socialists based in Oxford, and more specifically in Balliol College, and who were concerned with India, became involved in a homologous 'civilising mission' within Britain, university extension. Michael Sadler, secretary of the Oxford Delegacy in the 1890s, for example, later chaired the commission which was sent to reform Indian universities in 1919. A later member of this group was the philosopher A.D. Lindsay, who taught university extension classes in Yorkshire and subsequently became both Master of Balliol and the chairman of the University of Oxford Delegacy. His textbook *The Modern Democratic State* (1947) was a standard item on political syllabuses in adult education after World War II. Lindsay was also concerned about Indian education and chaired the Commission on Christian Higher Education in India which reported in 1931 on what it saw as the need for the transforming and healing power of the Christian message. Unlike Gore, he was quite mesmerised by Gandhi, whom he regarded as 'a saint'. Indeed, he found Gandhi's 'model of an integral social order was irresistible'.[29] Here, he believed, 'The hierarchies of caste would be transformed by the moral force of nationalism into a hierarchy of order rejecting the materialist premise of accumulation and competition and organised around mutual service'.[30]

This was of course very close to Ruskin's own formulations, which at some level Lindsay must have understood. Gandhi, then, returned a version of itself to the West with which liberal educationalists could identify. In it they, like Gandhi, saw the truly 'spiritual' nature of the East which they counterpoised to the brutally 'material' debased utilitarian practices of the British system. This was true to the extent that Gandhi shared with them a common critique of the social consequences of industrial capitalism. Ruskin's making common cause with the artisans of the West Riding of Yorkshire became an analogue of Gandhi's identity with the harijans. Ruskin's belief in a hierarchical but just society based on the dignity of labour and the joy of the craft became in effect Gandhi's own. So effectively had he been able to translate commonly held values into the Indian medium that English educationalists were able to read back from and see in Gandhi's ideas formulations which they already 'knew' in some sense from Ruskin.

Some of Gandhi's views on 'civilisation', are related to those of Edward Carpenter, a socialist mystic who was also part of the theosophical circle and a lecturer in university extension, whose *Civilisation, its Cause and Cure* (1889) was very influential. As Bikhu Parekh makes clear, Gandhi regarded civilisation generally as rotten but not irredeemable.[31] He wanted the spirit of scientific inquiry but without the scientific culture of materialism that appeared in the West to go with it. The real conflict in his thought was not so much between East and West as between the ancient and what form of the 'modern' was to be developed. He was not anti-modern as such, but rather against the ideology of Western modernity. Parekh argues that while his critique of civilisation was close in many respects to that of the critical tradition of Ruskin and also of Marx and Rousseau, he made two signal advances. Firstly, unlike the Europeans, his critique came from the experience of a native of an oppressed country. Secondly, Gandhi brought the intellectual perspectives and moral sensibility of Indian civilisation to the critique. From this cultural and subaltern distance he characterised modern civilisation as schizophrenic, because it represented itself as both Christian and spiritual on the one hand and anthropocentric and materialist on the other. For him, Christianity in the end merely justified the pursuit of narrow self-interest.[32] But he was caught in the paradox of wanting to appropriate the spirit of modern civilisation without its institutions.

While sceptical of Western democracy, which he regarded as merely a camouflage for ruling class exploitation, he was equally opposed to the materialistic doctrines of Bolshevism. He believed it was possible to create something from a specifically Indian ground which was nevertheless in its application global, the key to which was some notion of spirituality. Krishna Kumar claims that his real agenda was how to live with industrialisation, with its cycle of greed and violence, to which colonial exploitation was in fact secondary.[33] Later, he came to accept the inevitability of machines but not large-scale industrial production. He also wanted to escape the culture of the bureaucrat and the textbook which he saw as the inevitable concomitant of an industrial society.

In his belief in the value of small enclosed communities, however, Kumar argues that he shares the humanistic ideals of another Western educationalist, John Dewey, whose *Democracy and Education* (1916) also had such a wide influence on progressive thinking. Dewey's 'work-based model of learning', like Gandhi's project, links productive work with education. Both were products of early capitalist development and both believed in the small-scale rural community, composed of 'industrious, self-respecting and generous' citizens. Kumar also argues that Gandhi's proposal reads like a plea 'for delaying the growth of capitalism, for buying time to strengthen the capacities of men and women to live with machines'.[34]

Like Dewey, Gandhi also, perhaps somewhat unwillingly, advocated a secular pedagogy. Despite the centrality of religion to Gandhi's perspective he felt that 'religions as they are taught and practised today lead to conflict rather than unity.'[35] For him, the role of the teacher was that of a spiritual guru (rather than professional educator), who would convey the basic truths of all religions. Gandhi's relationship with the tradition of cultural criticism in the West, then, has to be contrasted with and separated from his opposition to the dominant colonial discourses and ideologies of Western progress. It is clearly homologous with but not simply learned from Western thinkers, and both share a common debt to an earlier sympathetic orientalism. One of the perhaps unintended consequences of imperialism was to return to Europe a notion of spirituality derived from Eastern religions just at the moment when spirituality seemed to have disappeared from Christianity. Gandhi seems to have responded to this spiritual renewal in Western alternative cultural formations and creatively worked it in with the

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work-based ethic he also found there. But both in India and Europe the Faustian charge of industrial capitalism could not wait on such subtle relationships, and Ruskin and Gandhi were destined to be consigned to the Museum of Quaint but Unworkable Ideas.

Congress and Basic Education

Basic Education quickly came under fire from the Congress Party's National Planning Committee under Nehru, and the industrialists (whom the party increasingly represented). A Congress sub-committee showed great reluctance in moving from the existing colonially derived system to Basic Education. They objected to the emphasis on vocation and 'child labour', and offered instead a broad liberal curriculum for elementary education, and expansion of facilities for technical education. Financial responsibility for compulsory primary education was to be the state's. Kumar comments:

> *This was indeed the staple diet of modernist thought, compared to which Gandhian ideas looked obsolete and conservative. In contrast to Gandhi's Utopia of village republics enjoying considerable autonomy but offering a modest standard of life dependent on rudimentary production processes, the modernist Utopia featured a strong centralised state responsible for building an industrial infrastructure in order to ensure a high standard of living for all.*[36]

In his *The Discovery of India* (1946) Nehru almost paraphrases Gandhi's argument about the centrality of crafts to education but for 'craft' he substitutes 'machine'. He agreed with the principle that a craft or manual activity stimulates a child's mind but challenged the main economic assumption of Basic Education. Gandhi in return criticised Nehru for believing that mere socialisation of industry would solve the problems, because, he held, the villages had to become self-contained and produce their own small-scale manufacturers. In governmental terms, Gandhi proposed popular sovereignty over representative democracy. Political power should be dissolved into the collective moral will, as a kind of 'enlightened anarchy', though this comes close to enlightened despotism on occasion. 'The Utopia is Ramarajya, a patriarchy in which the ruler by his moral quality and habitual adherence to truth, always expresses the collective will'.[37] For Gandhi, too, Ne-

hru's approach smacked too much of the British. He believed that the secularisation of education had made a fetish of the knowledge of letters which had exaggerated and rationalised social inequalities. Moreover, payment for mental labour was in itself immoral since bodily sustenance should come from bodily labour, and the division between mental and physical labour should be abolished since it led to social privilege for the non-manual worker.

Gandhi's Populism

What then was Gandhi's unique contribution? He was certainly not within the mainstream of Indian (or general Third World) nationalism. But he was no 'mere' peasant intellectual either: his objections to Western industrialism were not simple anti-colonial Luddism. Still less was Gandhi a replica of the post-Enlightenment romanticism of late nineteenth century Western Europe, although he adopted its critique of industrialism. His unique combination of non-violent nationalist politics with a desire for a genuine and deep 'spirituality', constructed an ideology and a social movement which acted as the critical catalyst for mobilising the independence movement. The problem for the nationalist leadership (Nehru *et al.*) was that they were almost without exception members of a small, Western-educated, and -oriented, vanguard or elite, with no real point of contact with the rural masses of India and only through Gandhi were they able to mobilise and absorb the masses. Politically, his effect was to mobilise the masses and articulate their grievances, but without giving them access to political power.

Partha Chatterjee provides a detailed and sophisticated elaboration of these linkages. By reconciling populist aspirations with the new bourgeois nationalist constitutional order, Gandhi provided for the first time an ideology for including the whole people within the political nation. He both challenged the fundamentals of nationalist thought through his attack on Western civilisation and yet inserted his political perspective within the process of nationalist politics. There is a fundamental incompatibility between the Utopianism of the moral conception and the realities of power. It created a conceptual framework of politics in which the peasants were mobilised but did not participate, and of a 'nation' of which they were part but also of a national state from which they were distanced.

Chatterjee describes Gandhi's nationalist politics as the 'mo-

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ment of manoeuvre'. This was followed by the 'moment of arrival', ascribed to Nehru, and the 'the passive revolution' in which an historical compromise was made between the dominant and subaltern classes. After 1932, when Nehru reacted against the stand Gandhi took on behalf of the harijans, nationalism became situated in the domain of state ideology. The discourse then shifted to the process of effectively governing the state rather than satisfying popular aspirations. The autonomy of the state became the central organising principle and its legitimising principle was social justice. Since the old colonial framework was seen as antiquated and incapable of delivery, modernity required new institutions with primacy given to economic affairs in a centralised state.

Nehru denied any essential split between East and West and argued that the only difference was the fact of industrial society (which the West had developed first, for historical reasons). India's subsequent backwardness was because colonialism had interrupted its normal historical development, which would have led to an industrial and materially prosperous society. He believed, however, that India could and should adopt humanism and the scientific spirit from the West – precisely what Gandhi was sceptical about – and he saw socialism as the most advanced expression of the rationalism of the European Enlightenment. The need for industrialisation was paramount, for without it poverty would not be eradicated and the political foundations of national independence would be threatened. This could only be done by a sovereign, non-colonial state. He dismissed Gandhi's small-scale production as economically unrealistic; what was wanted was bigness and big business. For Nehru the nation state lay at the heart of nationalism and had to embrace the whole people with equal citizenship irrespective of sex, language, caste, wealth or education. For both men, therefore, education was seen as an essential ideological tool. For Gandhi, it was the key, through his Basic Education programme, for creating a decentralised alternative to the modernising, Western-oriented society, while for Nehru, education, conceived as vocational, technological training, was a key means of bringing about the modernisation he and the nationalists thought was essential.

But Nehru was powerless without Gandhi. Chatterjee argues that Nehru found Gandhi 'incomprehensible' because he acted on emotive impulse and appeared to be able effortlessly and intuitively to sense the mass mind, while Nehru and the nationalist poli-

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ticians were distant and isolated. Although he found his economic and social ideas obsolete and in general reactionary, Gandhi had shaken up India more than any other revolutionary before him. He was 'a magician'. The ideas in *Hind Swaraj* were an 'utterly wrong and harmful doctrine'.[38] Gandhi was a philosophical anarchist whose ideas were functional in arousing the masses but useless for creating the new state. Nehru's trick was to incorporate Gandhi's 'truth' into the nationalist project while rejecting his metaphysics and language. As Chatterjee has commented, 'the relentless thrust of its (the new nationalist leadership) rationalist thematic turned the Gandhian intervention into a mere interlude in the unfolding of the real history of the nation'.[39]

So Gandhi was incorporated into the new nationalism as if in reality he did not represent an absolute alternative to it. No longer in need of magicians, the new nationalism emphasised 'expertise'. The new state would stand above conflicting interests and dispassionately judge with the technical expertise at its command. Nehru and the nationalist movement tried to create a secular, technocratic state, embodying the best elements of the Fabian, centralist socialist ideology within whose framework they had been reared politically in the West.

How does this ideological conflict appear, about half a century on? There can be no doubt that India has developed, educationally, socially and politically, broadly along the lines envisaged by Nehru and the nationalists. In almost all spheres, Gandhi's visions of a future India have not materialised. As far as education is concerned, the 'new values inculcated through mass education ... in form and content reflect Western values and practices in a way which would have horrified Gandhi, who had formulated such distinctive and Indian plans for Basic Education'.[40] Modern India has problems as grave as any faced at the time of independence. Violence, especially between the different ethnic and religious communities, and economic and social dislocation have soured the nationalist dream. And Bombay, undoubtedly the most Westernised and modern of Indian cities, also has some of the greatest disparities of wealth, some of the most abject poverty (and perhaps the most depressing general ambience) of all the great Indian urban centres.

In retrospect, Gandhi's insistence upon non-violent and spiritual values as the foundations of the new India seem eminently sane. His Basic Education programme certainly had its reactionary

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side: the authoritarian role of the teacher/guru (a tendency towards authoritarianism is a charge that can be levelled at Gandhi generally); the determined exclusion of abstract and particularly (Western) scientific knowledge; and the eccentricity of his almost obsessive concentration upon village crafts (especially the symbolic concern with spinning). All these are tangible and weighty criticisms. The values he espoused were socialist – though he was implacably opposed to both Marxist methods of conflict and violence, and to the socialist assumptions of industrialisation and economic, consumerist growth. His critique of state control of education is positive and libertarian, while not being simply individualistic. It prevents education being used as a vehicle for party or state ideology while at the same time asserting communistic values and social relevance. The continuing appeal of Gandhi and Gandhian philosophy to both East and West lies precisely in his espousal of the pure, idealistic values which underlie both religion and socialism, and his equally vehement rejection of the increasingly materialist criteria of both Eastern and Western society.

It is mistaken, though, to try to analyse Gandhi in predominantly political terms. He was not primarily a politician, still less a political theorist. For his biographer Judith Brown, he was 'fundamentally a man of vision and action, who asked many of the profoundest questions that face human-kind as it struggles to live in community. It was this confrontation out of a real humanity which marks his stature and makes his struggles and glimpses of truth of enduring significance'.[41] Whether his specific blueprint for Basic Education is, or ever was, viable or even desirable, is a moot point. But adult educators, East and West, will continue to identify with at least some aspects of his reassertion of the fundamentally humanistic bases of adult education's objectives and will acknowledge the centrality of the unanswered question of how to include the poorest, the harijans, in all societies in the commonweal.

Notes

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15. Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: Theosophy and the emergence of the western guru* (Secker and Warburg, 1992).
16. M.K. Gandhi, 1927, p. 49.
17. *ibid.*, p. 99.
18. *ibid.*, p. 115.
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25. *ibid.*, p. 21.
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Chapter 3

Educational Policy and Social Development in India from 1947 to 1964: Nehru and Congress

We described in Chapter 1 the explicit ideological objectives of educational provision in British India[1] and noted that education was intended to produce a sizeable group of Indian professionals, trained and equipped to service the needs of the British Raj, and also socialised into the culture and values of the British establishment. In addition, education was seen by the British as contributing to the 'civilising mission' – which also, of course, had economic, religious and political dimensions.[2] By the late nineteenth century if not earlier the British had realised, in India as in Britain, that the existing order could not be preserved and developed exclusively through force of arms and coercion. Education was a key part of the socialisation process for a small but significant number of Indians.

Ostensibly, the nationalist movement was formed in opposition not only to British rule *per se* but also to the imposition of British culture on the Indian people and the Indian nation. The battle for the hearts and minds of the Indian masses and of India's intellectual strata thus became of central importance in the nationalist movement's politics. And, within this, the position of education – its ideological place in the struggle against the British Raj, the nature of its curriculum and so on – was similarly contentious.

What in reality were the defining ideological characteristics of education within the nationalist movement and, after 1947, what have the governments of India been trying to achieve through education? These are the central questions to be addressed in this chapter. Our contention is that in contrast to the ostensibly anti-British and anti-Western rhetoric of the nationalist movement and

its consequent opposition to Western style education, the Congress Party has been deeply imbued with a series of British and Western ideological perspectives. Of course, these have been overlaid with and indeed merged with nationalist and specifically Indian cultural and social perspectives. But the 'British dimension' has remained important and identifiable in education, as in the wider political context. Whether this is for good or ill, or a bit of both, is a question to be returned to at the end of this chapter.

Jawaharlal Nehru (henceforth, Nehru) is the key figure in the Congress Party's ideological as well as political development. Nehru's perspectives on education in the context of nationalist politics and prescriptions represent and symbolise those of the Congress Party as a whole.[3] Anyone who has visited Nehru's magnificent house Teen Murti in New Delhi will be left in no doubt of the strong British (or, rather, English) influence. Books, household paraphernalia, photographs and letters, all testify to the centrality of Britain in Nehru's life. From his earliest years Nehru's outlook on life in general and social and political issues and ideas in particular were as much British as Indian. Although his biographer entitles the opening chapter of his first volume 'The Unformative Years', the whole work is permeated in fact by this British background. After his schooling at Harrow and his relatively undistinguished career at Cambridge, and later Oxford, Nehru returned to India and 'brought back with him attachments to Britain, and the values he considered British, which were never to leave him. They moulded his outlook, sustained him in his struggles, and influenced his policies in the days of his power. Throughout his life, Britain was a country with which (Nehru) identified extensively in the personal sense ... '[4] Nehru, speaking at his trial in 1922, claimed that he was, on his return to India from England, 'perhaps more an Englishman than an Indian. I looked upon the world almost from an Englishman's standpoint. And so I returned to India from England as much prejudiced in favour of England and the English as it was possible for an Indian to be'.[5]

What was the nature of this British influence? There are two fundamental if obvious points: Nehru's initial experience of Britain was exclusively of the upper class and intellectual milieux (Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge, the legal profession) and this social exclusivity was largely continued in his later life. Secondly, Nehru's subsequent political ideology and practice was quintessentially socialist and, although he was associated in various ways and

at various points with both Marxism and Soviet Communism (as is discussed below), this socialist perspective was firmly rooted in the democratic socialist traditions of the mainstream British left.

Nehru was from an Indian upper-class background and his British experiences reinforced rather than countered his indigenous surroundings. Nehru, and indeed most of the leading figures in the Congress Party, never had any real, direct experience of the Indian masses. And in many respects they had little rapport with the ordinary people. (It was here that Gandhi, as we have seen, provided the unique link and through his charisma and spiritual commitment mobilised the masses behind the nationalist movement in support of Congress in the crucial years.) The high culture and elitist liberalism of the British intellectual establishment was integrated with the attitudes of the Indian upper class from which Nehru came. As far as education was concerned, this led to the advocacy of a dualist structure. For the elite, education should be wide-ranging, steeped in the civilisation of the West, including mathematics and science but emphasising the classics, literature and the arts. Above all, it should develop an enquiring, critical frame of mind. For the mass of ordinary people, on the other hand, education should aim 'at imparting virtues such as obedience, modesty, rule-governed behaviour and acceptance of one's station in society.'[6] Nehru's educational policy, and that of Congress, certainly developed far beyond this nineteenth century foundation (see below), but this dichotomy and its dual ideological thrust remained fundamental. The central element in Nehru's educational strategy in fact became the training of the masses in science and technology, combined with a more general emphasis upon citizenship education. These are discussed in more detail below in the context of the Congress Party's national plans and education's role within them. However, in order to analyse the *ideological* context of these educational ideas, Nehru's firm attachment to socialism, both theoretically and in policy terms, should be discussed.

During his late adolescent years in Britain, Nehru gave little indication of political radicalism. According to his biographer, Nehru was always influenced more by William Morris than he was by the Fabians.[7] However, given his later political evolution this seems a rather romantic judgement. At all events, it is clear that by the late 1920s in the context of his growing involvement in the nationalist movement, Nehru 'had come round to the Marxist viewpoint in its broad essentials. He agreed that imperialism and

capitalism went hand in hand and neither would disappear until both were put down'.[8] This was never a full-blooded, Marxist-Leninist commitment, however. As early as 1928, Nehru was advocating a gradualist approach. Even though he 'had a grand design of socialism, he wanted a very modest beginning'.[9] For example, Nehru advocated not the nationalisation but the socialisation of land, with agricultural debts written off only after part payment. In the industrial sphere, 'the State should gradually acquire key industries, ensure a minimum living wage and impose sharply graduated direct taxes, an inheritance tax and a tax on agricultural income'.[10]

There is no evidence that Nehru was either interested in or familiar with the ideological complex of Marxist analysis. Rather, he had a typically British – and arguably essentially *liberal* – view of the absolute necessity to combine socialist objectives and strategy with a commitment to democracy. It was this broad commitment that underlay the successive National Five Year Plans from the late 1940s onwards. These involved strategic planning for the evolution of a socialist, planned economy within the framework of a parliamentary democracy. The ethos and the detail of Nehru's plans owed much to the revisionist socialism of Anthony Crosland, as his biographer notes:[11] again, the British influence is apparent.

This was a hugely ambitious project, given the size and nature of the Indian economy and wider society. Nehru was aiming for a society 'based on modernisation, industrialisation and a scientific temper',[12] with the initial emphasis placed upon 'the building of heavy industry for the production of capital goods as a base ... and on the wide expansion of village industries for producing consumer goods as well as employment'.[13] Key to this whole process was an ambitious programme of training and education. But this remained, to an extent, at the level of rhetoric. True, *university* education expanded rapidly,[14] but little was done to provide mass technological training for the envisaged new industrial society. In reality, Nehru placed little emphasis upon education, at least in the early years of independence. In so far as education was of primary concern, the emphasis was upon popular participation and democracy as an essential element of community development. This relates to Nehru's central concern with creating an informed electorate to provide the basis for a real democracy. There are strong and direct analogies here with the British nineteenth century radical project to convert the system into a real, informed democracy. (And here too was one of the ideological driving forces be-

hind the early years of University Extension and the Workers' Educational Association in Britain.)

However, the overwhelming emphasis in Nehru's and the Congress's planning strategy was upon 'heavy industry and machine-building in the industrial sector and co-operative farming in agriculture'.[15] To this end, Nehru 'periodically multiplied the funds allotted to scientific research by the government and stressed to scientists the contribution they should make to industrial development'.[16] The ethic was one of modernisation as a means of ensuring a better life for the mass of the population. A 'better life' was defined partly in material terms, but also in terms of qualitative spiritual improvement. All this was to be encompassed within a system of archetypally British democratic, parliamentary socialism. This 'was the gospel of Tawney rather than of Marx but Tawney with an ethical commitment replacing the core of Christian faith'.[17] It is worth noting here that despite the strong base of the nationalist movement and of Congress in Hinduism, Nehru remained 'an agnostic, but a Hindu agnostic.'[18]

Nehru never succeeded fully in achieving his objectives. But under the three National Plans from 1947 to the mid-1960s the economic improvements were impressive: national income increased by 42%, food production by 46% and industrial production by 94%. Although population increased by 21%, food consumption rose from 1,800 calories to 2,100 calories per capita and use of cloth from a little over nine yards per year per head to 14.5 yards. Moreover, he achieved these advances within the context of a developed, liberal democracy, with an emphasis upon religious and community tolerance. Despite all the communal conflicts since independence, and all the violence and assassinations, this political achievement is of equal importance to the economic.

In both spheres Nehru's fundamentally radical socialist stance was modified considerably. Essentially, Nehru subscribed 'to the principles of a mixed economy',[19] within an economic consensus between the public and the private sectors, and a context of political reformism. Despite the achievements, Nehru's strategic objectives were not met. India was not industrialised on Western lines (or indeed on the Soviet model); communal and sectarian bigotry and violence has not been eradicated, rather the reverse; and there has been 'no permanent and irresistible shift in power and wealth to the lowest rungs of society ... All the measures introduced by Nehru were found compatible with the maintenance of capitalist

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relations of production and the preservation of middle-class hegemony.'[20]

The concluding section of this chapter will explore the reasons for this mix of success and failure and review the implications for future policy. Before that discussion, we return to the issues with which this chapter began: the place of educational policy in this process and the degree to which the specifically educational objectives derived from British perspectives.

According to Kumar, there have been three key dynamics for educational policy in the nationalist, independence movement: justice, self-identity and progress towards industrialisation.[21] Because of the essentially reformist – arguably Fabian socialist – political assumptions of Nehru and the Congress Party, there was a paramount concern with commercial and industrial success and growth within the mixed economy model. Socialisation, rather than coercion, let alone revolution, was seen as the means of transforming the society from its agrarian, primitive basis to the informed democracy desired by Congress. Within this process, education had a central role. 'Knowledge was what the new education was supposed to give, but its inner agenda was to improve conduct.'[22] Thus, although there were strong and obvious utilitarian reasons for educational development within the planning framework, the ethical considerations of inculcating moral responsibility to the newly independent India were equally important.

Although these ideas could be construed as egalitarian, they were in fact predominantly elitist. There was a continuation of the belief of the British Raj that the most important aspect of education was concerned with the small elite groups in society, which could then 'filter down' appropriate educational and ideological knowledge and perspectives to the masses. Of course, under the nationalist movement, the *content* was envisaged as changing radically, but the process and structure remained the same. Educational policy under the Congress Party in fact did little for elementary education and precious little for secondary or adult education: the main emphasis was upon the expansion of the University sector. Kumar comments that, since independence:

> *primary schools remained bare and desolate, and little interest was shown in altering the epistemological basis of colonial education. Modernisation and industrial growth became the high drama of the state while social life and culture continued to be*

> *shaped by widespread illiteracy and the power of religious answers to basic questions concerning material life ...* [23]

While the focus of concern in this chapter is education, it would be a mistake to imply that Nehru and the Congress Party normally placed education *per se* at the heart of their political strategy. In the first National Plan, for example, Nehru placed the emphasis on community development as the key agency of change; in the second Plan, he emphasised *panchyat raj* (regime of village councils) as the key agency. By the time of the third Plan Nehru had decided that education was the key, 'the revolutionary factor which would change the face of the country.'[24] In each phase, Nehru was searching for the elusive – indeed illusory – magic ingredient which could unlock the problematic of achieving progress to modernisation within a mass agrarian society, and a democratic political framework. This search for agency in the quest for progressive change has characterised radical movements in the Western world, in different though equally intractable contexts.[25]

Although the first two Five Year Plans had delivered significant economic progress Nehru was well aware that, by the early 1960s, India had become increasingly dominated by capitalist structures, and indeed by an increasingly powerful 'group of leading capitalists ... the "ugly business man" was the major character on the Indian scene, making large profits, promoting corruption, securing the support of officials and manipulating the administrative machinery.'[26] The main objective remained to transform India into a modern, democratic and *socialist* society. How could this be achieved, given the relative lack of political progress towards this objective since 1947? Nehru's answer, in the third Five Year Plan, was to emphasise decentralisation and education. Essentially, he was arguing that participatory democracy, and a structure which facilitated the growth of real, local power for ordinary people, was the only means by which capitalism and the caste structure, the unholy alliance of the negative aspects of the new and the old India, could be defeated. The 'community development' orientation of the earlier Plans had had a similar intention but had become bogged down in the notorious bureaucracy of Indian government, in part at least another legacy of the British Raj. The effect had been not to empower the peasantry but rather to make them reliant on ever more complex government systems of grant-aid and administrative support. In the late 1950s Nehru decided to reactivate

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the *panchyat* system, with each village electing a representative council, which in turn would be linked to groups of 40 to 50 villages, with the chairman of these comprising a *zila parishad* to deal with the administrative and economic affairs of the district. There are striking analogies here with G.D.H. Cole's 'Guild Socialist' blueprints for translating syndicalist principles into the practice of worker-controlled democratic structures.[27] The British influence is evident yet again: Nehru's continuing attempt to devise ways of linking political democracy with socialist economic structures. 'I believe,' Nehru said in 1960, 'that the real foundations of freedom and a democratic structure are being firmly laid by these movements. This is the real *swaraj* of the people. Even as we put our faith in our people, so will they respond and help in building up this great country of ours.'[28] Nehru argued that through this new structure, the passive, top-down revolution which he and Congress had been trying to create would be replaced by active, democratic revolution inspired by, and subsequently carried out by, the masses themselves. Belatedly, Nehru realised that only through extending primary and secondary education could the new system hope to succeed.

> *The third Plan aimed to have in school about 20 million children comprising 60% of those aged six to fourteen years. But it was also proposed to provide in nearly 30% of schools the type of education which was suited to the developmental activities of the local community. The object was the schooling of the Indian peasant ... teaching him to modernise without losing his roots in the cultural past.*[29]

Nehru became so convinced of the political importance of education that he was prepared to reduce expenditure on engineering projects rather than education. Echoing Lenin, Nehru argued that *panchyat raj* plus electric power would transform India. But, whilst education progressed rapidly in the larger towns, this was far too ambitious a programme for the rural communities.

Nehru became disillusioned by the failure of education, just as he had been by the earlier failures of the 'magic ingredients' in the context of previous National Plans. Eruptions of communal violence and religious bigotry served to emphasise the distance between Nehru's idealism and the actual, real-life cultural perspectives of the Indian masses. Nothing if not persistent, Nehru convened a National Integration Conference in 1961 to take for-

ward a national agenda of a mass campaign for a pledge of non-violence to be taken by every adult, a reorientation of education to extend the teaching of English and Hindi, and the production of a code of conduct for political parties and a regional balance in economic development.[30] However, these policies were again overtaken by wider political agendas, both domestic and international: Goa, the conflict with China, Nehru's role in the developing anti-colonial struggles in Africa, and mounting conflict with Pakistan.

After these crises, culminating in the traumatic war with China, Nehru was a diminished man, compared by his biographer, perhaps rather harshly, to Ramsay MacDonald after the 1931 débâcle.[31] But he returned in his last years to emphasise the centrality of both primary and secondary education *and* adult education, through the *panchyat raj* system. He even backtracked on his central priority of heavy industry: 'I am all for industry, I am all for steel plants and this and that, but I do say agriculture is far more important than any industry.'[32] The reasons for this reassertion were quite clearly based on the political failure of independent India to move towards a socialist restructuring. What use was there ultimately in economic and nationalist progress if the results were to strengthen capitalism, and leave untouched religious bigotry, communal conflict and peasant ignorance?

All his political life Nehru was searching for the political combination, in strategic and ideological terms, which could unlock this dilemma. In absolute terms, he failed. The transformation did not take place. Since his death in 1964 India has suffered many tragedies and divisions: if anything, Nehru's dream of a socialist democracy seems further away in the 1990s than the 1950s. We shall discuss in the next chapter how the specific education programmes in the last two decades have been fraught with problems and, although literacy rates have increased and all sectors of education have expanded tremendously, education cannot be said to have fulfilled Nehru's political objectives.

How far have these failures been due to Nehru's undoubted British, gradualist ideological stance? Did his mixture of Fabian planning with a mixed economy, and liberal-cum-socialist political democracy, result in a reformist structure too weak to confront and defeat the forces of capitalism and of indigenous religious and sectarian prejudice?

The way such questions are posed implies that there are viable alternatives. Is this true? To take Western, and especially British,

examples first: it is undoubtedly the case that reformist politics in the twentieth century have failed to achieve a fundamental restructuring of economic and political power,[33] although a case can be made for such reformism having succeeded in humanising, at least partially, an otherwise brutalised system.[34] Moreover, extra-parliamentary agencies of change – the Peace Movement, for example – whilst on occasion successful in realising specific objectives, have demonstrably failed to act as a catalyst for fundamental political revolt and subsequent restructuring.[35] And of course it almost goes without saying that, in the West, the revolutionary alternatives to reformism, whether Communist, Trotskyist or Anarchist, have nowhere succeeded in overthrowing, and only on rare occasions have seriously undermined, the hegemony of capitalist culture and economic structure.

The 'Second World' alternatives, primarily the Leninist model of the USSR, had some attractions for Third World radical, nationalist governments, including Nehru and the Congress Party. Just as the Webbs found Soviet centralised planning attractive in the late 1920s, so Nehru went through a phase of admiration for the Soviet model. But this admiration was confined to the economic centralisation of the system and the impressive power this gave for economic and social change: he never wavered in his belief politically that democracy was the only viable system to deliver the type of socialist and egalitarian system for which he was striving.

Other Third World nationalist models hardly offer any more sanguine a prospect. There are undoubtedly some exceptions, but, generally, neither the one-party states of independent Africa, nor the socialist and nationalist states of the Middle East provide particularly appealing role models.

All this is one side of the context. The other is that, despite Nehru's and Congress's undoubted failures, they also achieved some remarkable successes. Brief mention has already been made of economic advances. There have also been major achievements in literacy (with the most recent estimates showing that, despite massive population increase, the literacy rate is growing steadily)[36] and in general educational expansion. Most important of all, however, Nehru and the Congress Party showed a total and unswerving commitment to humane, national, secular and democratic principles. To establish the largest democracy in the world, in a subcontinent of poverty, economic backwardness and bitter sectarian bigotry, was a major achievement by any standard. Likewise, the

creation of a new, positive, neutralist foreign policy stance – a theme which we have not touched on given the focus of this chapter – was a huge political achievement, and acted as an inspiration to many others, not only in the Third World but also to radicals in the West and the Communist East.[37]

In the end, Nehru came full circle ideologically, arguing that there can be no short-cut to socialism and democracy. To build a viable socialism entails an informed, tolerant and responsible citizenry. Education is thus a key component in this process. Only when the ordinary people are fully educated, through primary, secondary and adult education structures, can India finally reject the negative, communalistic and violent culture and conflicts which now bedevil the whole sub-continent. Nehru did not complete this process – far from it – but he *began* it, and he did not deviate from the essential principles of socialist democracy. His socialism certainly derived its inspiration, emotionally as well as intellectually, from a succession of European (mainly British) radicals: Marx, Morris, Russell, the Fabians, Bernal, Haldane, Tawney. But he used this intellectual canon within a nationalist context to create a specifically Indian socialist democracy.

What was the alternative? Gandhi's perspective, whilst similar in many respects, differed fundamentally, both intellectually and culturally.[38] But Nehru was in the end arguably more in touch with political and cultural reality. He described his contribution, with typical modesty, as giving the right push in the right direction to the economy and to society[39]. He certainly did far more than that. The question remains as to whether it has been enough to counter capitalist economic pressure and the various negative social pressures of Indian society.

Finally, what of his education policy? Although at times, and especially in the third Five Year Plan, Nehru highlighted education as the key to liberation, this was a fitful commitment. And it was never followed through. Understandably, in the chaos of India's domestic and international politics, the enormity of India's educational problems was never properly and consistently addressed. Perhaps this weakness symbolises not so much Nehru's failures as India's chronic structural problems. Had Nehru and the Congress Party had the opportunity and the resources to pursue a radical and coherent educational policy perhaps their socialist objectives would have been attained. At the very least, Nehru's politics, in both his ideological perspectives and his political practice, demon-

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strated the centrality of educational policy as an agency for radical change in the Indian context.

Notes

1. See Chapter 1.
2. See Chapter 4.
3. The only significant oppositional strand to this perspective on education was that articulated, and practised, forcefully by Gandhi, cf. Chapter 2.
4. Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A biography*, 3 volumes (Jonathan Cape, 1975, 1979, 1984). This quotation is from vol. 1, p. 28.
5. Quoted in *ibid.* p. 28.
6. Krishna Kumar, *The Political Agenda of Education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), p. 31.
7. See Gopal, vol. 1, 1975, p. 24.
8. *ibid.*, pp. 104–5.
9. *ibid.*, p. 114.
10. *ibid.*
11. Gopal, vol. 2, 1979, p. 201.
12. *ibid.*, p. 306.
13. *ibid.*, p. 201.
14. Gopal, vol. 3, 1984, p. 14.
15. Gopal, vol. 2, 1979, p. 306.
16. *ibid.*, p. 306.
17. Gopal, vol.3, 1984, p. 17.
18. *ibid.*, p. 17.
19. Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A political biography* (Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 513.
20. Gopal, vol. 3, 1984, pp. 295–6.
21. Kumar, 1991, Chapter 1.
22. *ibid.*, p. 33.
23. *ibid.*, p. 196.
24. Gopal, vol. 3, 1984, p. 170.
25. For a discussion of this issue in relation to the British Peace

Movement, see Richard Taylor, 'The British peace movement and socialist change', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds, *Socialist Register 1983* (Merlin Press, 1983).

26. Gopal, vol. 3, 1984, p. 166.
27. See, for example, G.D.H. Cole's books, *The World of Labour* (1913), *Self-Government in Industry* (1917), and *Guild Socialism Re-Stated* (1920).
28. Nehru's message on the first anniversary of the inauguration of *panchyat raj* in Andhra, 20 October 1960.
29. Gopal, vol. 3, 1984, p. 169.
30. *ibid.*, pp. 180–1 ff.
31. *ibid.*, p. 239.
32. Nehru's address to the two houses of the legislature of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, 27 July 1963. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 242.
33. See, for example, Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism* (1973), *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969), etc.; David Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism* (1975), *Labour in Power* (1980).
34. See the whole Labourist literature: for example, Anthony Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (1956); Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan* (2 volumes, 1962 and 1973); Geoffrey Foote, *The Political Thought of the Labour Party*.
35. See Richard Taylor, *Against the Bomb: The British nuclear disarmament movement of 1958 to 1965* (1988); Sheila Rowbotham *et al.*, *Beyond the Fragments* (1979).
36. By the late 1980s around 40% of the population was literate. The decadal growth of literacy had increased from 1% in 1900–63 to 6.5% in 1980. See C.P.S. Chauhan, 'Education for all: the Indian scene', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol. 9, no. 1, January–March, 1990.
37. This was particularly true of the British New Left of the late 1950s and early 1960s, where positive neutralism was a central ideological and conceptual belief. See, for example, E.P. Thompson, ed., *Out of Apathy* (1960).
38. See Chapter 2.
39. Nehru's address to the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Delhi, 24 March 1962, quoted in Gopal, vol. 3, 1984, p. 300.

Chapter 4

Social Education and the Dream of Nationhood

Britain's colonial disengagement from India in 1947 severed the imperialist power from one of the most powerful sources of its strength[1] but left behind it not so much a liberated territory as one in which the revolution was only half-completed. From the mid-nineteenth century Britain had been careful to cultivate a Westernised elite for the daily burden of actually administering the colony, while ultimate power was retained by the British. E.J. Hobsbawm has claimed that the

> *most powerful legacy of imperialism was, therefore, an education in Western ways of minorities of various kinds: for the favoured few who became literate and therefore discovered, with or without the assistance of Christian conversion, the high road of ambition which wore the white collar of the clergyman, teacher, bureaucrat or office worker.*[2]

In the years immediately following independence in 1947, the newly-coined concept of social education replaced that of adult education. At the heart of the social education commitment lay the notion that adult education must equip the 'Indian people to play their part worthily in a democratic social order.'[3] Social education included literacy but added a civic and social element. The new adult education was thus seen as 'enabling the common man to live a richer life in all its aspects – social, economic, cultural and moral ... (it) must endeavour to develop (his) powers of initiative, judgement and integrity', as a citizen. Social education thus had the following elements: literacy; extension – usable knowledge in the home and the field; general education on such matters as health, civic rights, self-reliance and leisure; leadership training for the village. It also included something called 'social consciousness', a

somewhat vaguely defined inculcation of the rights and duties of the citizen of the new India, within an overall context of a community-oriented ideology. Social education emphasised an organic community of teachers and learners, using radio and film as well as traditional media, and envisaged training centres for social education organisers. These ambitions were embodied formally in the 1948 Report of the Adult (Social) Education Committee. The social objectives were detailed, and an age range for adult education was set as 12–45 (the starting age signalling the end of compulsory education). A central co-ordinating board of experts was appointed to take information from other countries and develop the programmes. Numerous reports and commissions followed through the 1960s and 1970s (Report of the Committee on Social Education Literature, 1952; Report on Social Education, 1963; Report of the Standing Committee, 1965, and so on). All these reports recommended the further extension and development of social education in various forms, embodying one or other variety of a mixture of literacy and social education.

Levels of literacy have changed dramatically in post-Independence India. By 1989, 45% of the population was estimated to be literate, and the provisional results of the 1991 census indicate that this figure has now risen to over 50%. In part, this has been due to the successive literacy programmes organised through the adult education agencies. This is not the place to enter into details of such schemes, but two points should be noted: there can be no simple equation between adult education and literacy development because much of the latter took place as a result of other social changes (in community development, in the general development of urbanisation and industrialisation and of course through improving school education); and secondly, there is little reliable evidence of either the extent or the effectiveness of *social* education.

Bordia's statistical outlines of expenditure on adult education in the Five Year Plans which ran from 1951 to 1966 show expenditure against numbers of people made literate but it is hard to know how meaningful the figures are. There was clearly pressure to maximise numbers but no evidence is supplied as to what standard was reached or what the rate of reversion was. The falling priority given to literacy after the initial enthusiasm of the first Five Year Plan is dramatically revealed both in the drop in adult education expenditure as a proportion of the educational grant from 3.3% to 0.5% over the course of the three programmes and in the fact that

the numbers made literate annually declined gradually. The statistics also reflect an imbalance between town and country, with much greater illiteracy in the villages, and between men and women (with much greater illiteracy among women). Bordia concludes that the spectacular achievements of the first Five Year Plan were not continued and the challenge to eradicate illiteracy by 1974 was dropped from the fourth Five Year Plan. 'It is evident,' he says, 'that in spite of brave declarations, those in authority are unable to find the resources for a meaningful programme of adult education.'[4]

These features of Indian adult education are much more than incidental: they are elements of the contradictory processes and ideological stances that lie at the heart of its development since 1947. The new leadership of India from 1947 was committed above all else to *modernisation*, as has been argued in preceding chapters: this was seen as the essential solution to India's massive problems of hunger, disease, backwardness and illiteracy. In Nehru's vision of a secular, socialist and prosperous India, vocational training, but not education *per se*, had a key role to play.[5] Given this orientation towards education as instrumental and vocational, the new Government continued with the British system, albeit in a radically different social and political context. With the important but ultimately unsuccessful exception of Gandhian community education experiments, India adopted the basic programmes and structures of Western, and especially British, education. Professor Shukla has characterised this as education for modernisation, embodying the elements of literacy and vocationalism already referred to here, but including also a strong emphasis upon *grading* by age and achievement, and upon *standardisation* via general text books and centralised examinations.[6] In ideological terms, the Indian government also stressed scientific, rationalist methodology and a commitment to egalitarian, though implicitly non-Marxist, socialism.

Whilst such programmes have certainly helped to improve literacy, the main effect of adult and of all post-school education has often been to provide 'little more than a passage to clerkship'.[7] There have been elements of social education, even of commitment to what in the British context would be termed 'social purpose' education with its implications of radical and collective social change. But, after the First Year Plan and up until the National Adult Education Programme, launched in 1978, these have

remained largely at the level of rhetoric. The fragile, indeed embryonic, structures of adult education have had to bear an impossible ideological load. Many adult educators, and even more so politicians, have talked about adult education as the solution to the problem of illiteracy and even the bearer of a new Utopia, as if either of these things could be achieved in the absence of enormous social and economic changes. Because of the scale of economic, social and political problems that India has faced since 1947, perhaps it is inevitable that adult education has been couched within somewhat grandiose, macrocosmic schemes, such as social education, and all social planning has been within the framework of *modernisation*. Even so, the problem of mismatch between adult education's very ambitious objectives and its minimal resources has been extreme. With the partial exception of the literacy improvements, the effects of the adult education programmes have been both intangible and long-term (whereas, of course, politicians always require the opposite).

In the 1960s visiting Western observers recommended a return to the traditional colonising and elitist discourses, or variations of these, as solutions to these seemingly intractable problems. Professor W.E. Styler of Hull University, for example, argued that given the paucity of resources and the scale of the problems, India would be better advised to give a lower priority to literacy for the masses and concentrate clearly upon more selective and intensive educational programmes.[8] Styler also warned that Indians were too preoccupied with their villages, which he called 'dens of ignorance and localism',[9] and not enough with towns, where there was danger of civil unrest. He noted the dominance of illiteracy, the poor status of the teacher and the lack of suitable teaching material and also the lack of intellectual curiosity of the students. But he also drew attention to the dangers inherent in the dominance of Western educational methods and ideas, which, divorced from religious teaching, had de-Indianised the literate class, thus creating a crisis of identity. He held that India should aim to become an 'educative' society, mixing the best features of traditional Indian culture with modern knowledge from the West and the Soviet Union. While appreciating the *vidyapeeths*, Styler was highly critical of the social education programme as a whole, concluding that mass adult literacy programmes made little impact. He argued that social education should be replaced by selective programmes based upon factories and the under-30s. By concentrating resources on key

groups of the already educated, an educational vanguard could be formed which could benefit India's intellectual life. However, Styler's prescription sounds uncomfortably close to the old East India Company's nineteenth century 'filtration' model of education, which also held that, by educating an elite, culture would gradually trickle down to the masses. This perhaps signalled the limitations of the approach of the Western, in this case British, expert, unable to extricate himself entirely from traditional discourses of education or applying top-down models of adult education to India.

Somewhat more creative thinking did emanate from other foreign sources. While Styler was unwilling to focus on the problems of mass illiteracy, the American Frank Laubach formulated the 'Each One Teach One' programme, which was for a while remarkably successful, though it too suffered from underfunding. Laubach was deeply committed to India and was actively engaged from 1935 to 1970, the year of his death. Although inspired by Gandhi, Laubach was also profoundly anti-Communist and he saw literacy work as rescuing India from the Soviet menace.[10] His most intense work was done after Independence in 1947, but because of the evangelism of some of his followers, who extended his legend to 'Each One Teach One ... and win one for Christ', there was a reaction against foreign Christian missionaries in the late 1950s and his attentions shifted elsewhere. Nevertheless, despite criticism that his methods were repetitive and mechanical, Laubach's work 'showed the way' and drew the attention of the world to the urgency of literacy programmes.[11]

Lalage Bown has also suggested that the origins of 'community development' lie in experiments in India as early as the 1920s and that it was through the diffusion network of UNESCO and returning colonial officials that such schemes were taken up in the West after World War II.[12] Despite such examples of reverse influence based on fruitful indigenous experiments, it appears that Indian adult education may have suffered from residual hegemonic pressure and an overvaluing of Western expertise because of its effects on academic advancement and credibility. However, adult education, as much else, has been affected by a schism between traditionalism and modernism, as analysed in the preceding chapters. The whole of Indian education, and perhaps adult education in particular, has been permeated by a confused and contradictory discourse about what its aims should be. On the one hand there is the Gandhian concern for the villages and a past way of 'organic'

life that has to be reclaimed through education; and on the other there is a focus upon a future India that will be urbanised, with education concentrating on functional skills, including literacy, that have to be taught for India to become a modern and dynamic economy. These issues are clearly not resoluble in the educational context alone and relate to wider and more fundamental social and political questions.

Nevertheless, certain themes and directions are apparent. The 'British system', in terms of elite training and cultural assumptions within a generally hierarchical system of education, has been maintained. However, just as in Britain, this sits somewhat uneasily with a commitment to social purpose adult education. In the Indian context this has been strongly backed by government as a part of its ideological drive to modernisation. In all these areas, however, the problems of under-resourcing have been so acute that relatively little progress has been possible.

For critics such as Shukla, social and economic determinants will always distort educational objectives:

> *the prospect of a lifelong education and a learning society appears distant and visionary. It looks like the transportation of the next stage of the developed societies into a highly underdeveloped one. The only likely consequence of such educational concepts in a society of unequal distribution, not to speak of socio-economic disparities, is further accentuation of these disparities, thus providing more education for the already educated while failing to attend to the task of essential minimum learning for the illiterates.*[13]

Despite the fact that Indian adult educators have many commitments and ideals in common with their radical counterparts in Western societies, the liberal perspective itself, embodying both the individualist and the collectivist social purpose ethics, may be too compromised by colonial discourses to offer usable solutions.[14] The 'rising voice' in a younger generation of Indian adult educators has been for 'participatory' and 'emancipatory' adult education, along the lines of Paulo Freire. This spares little time for the niceties of the Western liberal tradition, although it shares some of its more radical dialogic qualities. This mode of adult education belongs markedly to voluntary sector projects funded either at arm's length by the Indian government under the NAEP programme and its successors or by international sponsorship. It is di-

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rectly partisan with the poor and trenchantly opposed to the dominant elite. The programmes aim at creating a political consciousness of their oppression among the poor and 'empowerment' to do something about it. 'Gandhi' has become the sign for their commitment, which is pithily summed up by the authors of the Indian Social Institute's Mobile Orientation and Training Team report, *Learning from the Rural Poor*:

> *There have been many pioneers in adult education in India, Mahatma Gandhi having been one of the most eminent. Yet adult education never succeeded in evolving into a movement for mass education. The National Adult Education Programme, launched in 1978, was intended to become such a movement, but it could not contend successfully with the social forces that wanted the masses of the people to remain in a position of submission, deprived of a literate culture of their own ... Illiteracy, poverty and exploitation go together. The vast rural population which can only sign with a thumb impression, has been excluded from being active participants in the developing process. These people, whose immense potential of imagination and creativity remains undeveloped, continue to be 'blossoms in the dust'.*[19]

Once the project of modernity became the object of global scepticism as the massive bureaucratic systems erected in its service began to collapse and fragment, programmes derived from decentred, voluntary and self-help organisations appeared to offer a genuinely developmental adult education to the rural poor. In India 'modernisation' placed a burden too heavy to be borne on the shoulders of an under-resourced adult education service but a rethinking of the Gandhian project of a holistic education based on the real needs of the poorest people suggested to this new generation a positive alternative.

The Burden of Modernisation

Despite the hopes held out for education as means of modernisation and progress in India the general view is that it has not lived up to expectations. It has not provided the motor for social reform that Nehru and the Congress party had envisaged. Rather, it has served the interests of the dominant elite while leaving the vast mass of the poor in a continued state of illiteracy and cultural immiseration. The leading educationalist J.P. Naik wrote that in spite

of all the brave rhetoric of the government's commitment to social reform through education, the result was only 'the strengthening of the power base of the upper and middle classes who have used the State to further their own ends and to perpetuate their own privileged position'.[16] Within the overall budget for education, which has increased proportionately especially in primary, secondary and higher education, the amount for adult education remained pathetically small.

In an assessment of the post-Independence development of Indian education up to 1975, another Indian educator, Amrik Singh, divided the period into two phases. The first of these lasted until the late 1960s. The feature common to both of them was the phenomenal quantitative expansion of all levels of education compared with the period of British colonial rule. In the 20 years since 1950 the enrolment in primary and secondary schools had tripled from around 25 million to 80 million students. University enrolment had risen even faster and was now eight times greater at over three million students. By any standards, Singh concluded, 'this was an impressive achievement and one any country could be proud of'.[17] The expenditure on education from all sources, central, state and local, had risen from Rs 1,150 million in 1950 to Rs 10,000 million in 1970 but there was a marked emphasis, as the figures show, on higher and professional education.

The expansion of education was carried out in a series of Five Year Plans, which continue up to the present. Each contained targets and reflected shifts in relative priorities. The first Five Year Plan was regarded as more formal than real but contained the largest proportion that adult education was to achieve, at roughly 3.3% of the whole budget. The Second Five Year Plan (1956–61), drawing its priorities largely from the Soviet model of state planning, concentrated on the needs of heavy industry, steel manufacture and power generation but, although the educational budget almost doubled, the proportion allocated to adult education fell to 1.4%, a 20% fall in real terms. Increased funding went instead into an expansion of technical and professional education, and the proportion of the budget spent on higher education increased from less than one-fifth to a quarter. Like Naik, Singh also believed that the dominant elite were the direct beneficiaries of this policy.

During the 15 years since the country had become independent the middle class had become more numerous, more powerful and at the same time more vocal. The fruits of economic growth had

gone mostly to the growing middle class. Wherever growth had taken place and whatever form it had taken, the richest part of the harvest had gone in every case to those who were qualified to participate in and control these activities. This meant more and more social demand for higher education.[18]

By the early 1970s the political consequences of the increasing imbalance of educational funding towards the middle classes were being signalled by economists and others and a political split in the ruling party led to a marked radicalisation of educational aims, at least rhetorically. Thus when the fifth plan (1974–79) was being drawn up it was decided to allocate 50% to elementary education in order to begin to redress the balance in favour of the poor, and in successive revisions the proportion devoted to elementary education has stayed fairly high. It was believed that increased elementary education would gradually eliminate illiteracy. Despite the hope that an irreversible shift in funding towards the lower classes would follow, the proportion spent on higher education remained stubbornly high and when hyper-inflation suddenly gripped the Indian economy the debate about allocation of resources seemed irrelevant, despite the fact that by 1965 higher education now consumed about one-third of the educational budget.

However, it was not only elementary education that, according to Singh, was the casualty of the manipulation of policy by an aggressive middle class but also adult education. Adult education's priority of literacy teaching, though justifiably regarded as important, neglected the need for *continuing* education, with the result that India had an overall low level of skills in both industry and agriculture. So in the mid-1970s Singh concluded that, along with elementary education, adult education had to be given a much higher priority by government both to eradicate illiteracy and to improve skills and techniques. Clearly, the politics of education were an important factor in determining the distribution of resources and the fact that British rule had ended did not appreciably increase the access of the lower classes to education. The proportion of the budget spent on adult education had in fact dropped to 0.3% in the third Five Year Plan, an actual cut in real terms of 50%. In the fourth plan, although expenditure was more than quadrupled, it still remained at only 1% of the whole budget.[19]

The Indian Adult Education Association, and its president, Dr M.S. Mehta, complained constantly that adult education received both a low priority and meagre resources in the first four Five Year

Plans. They also argued that to become an authentic part of national policy literacy should be at the centre of general community development, covering programmes of agricultural improvement, sanitation, nutrition, family planning and social education in general. This signalled a return to the neglected priorities of social education and heralded the onset of the Community Development programmes.

The scale of the problem in India is revealingly displayed by C.P.S. Chauhan in a brief survey of Indian education. By the late 1980s India was having to support 16% of the world's population on 2% of the total global income. In 1981 probably 65% of the population was illiterate, rising to 75% in the case of women. The figures were proportionately higher for the rural population over the urban. The main cause for optimism in this somewhat depressing scene was that the decadal growth of literacy had increased from 1% in 1900–30 to 6.5% in 1980.[20]

By the sixth plan in the late 1970s a relative turn towards adult education seems to have been consolidated, as indicated by a large-scale programme among the rural poor, which used nearly 6% of the total education budget, the highest proportion so far. There was a marked increase in the involvement of voluntary organisations, 380, and 49 university projects were funded. During this period the government estimated that the literacy rate rose to 38%. The government report, however, noted both gender and regional discrepancies, with, for example, the literacy rate for women varying from 67% in Kerala to 5.4% in Rajasthan. Nationally, literacy among women in the late 1980s stood at nearly 25% while among men it was almost double at 47%.[21] In common with most adult educationists, Chauhan offers qualified praise for this achievement, his main point being that modest though the earlier education record of the 35 years of post-Independence might be, it was substantially better than anything achieved under the British. From this brief review it is clear that progress in adult education became almost identical with progress in creating literacy amongst the adult population. But this is not the whole story and we need to review the main conceptual developments of the period.

The intoxication that greeted Independence in 1947 from British rule was tempered by sober concern for the kind of state the Raj had bequeathed its former subjects. Many argued that British imperialism had in fact arrested development at the feudal stage, where 'Under feudalism and imperialistic systems, the masses of

the people generally toil for the ruling and the aristocratic and affluent sections of the people. The common people are allowed to remain content with their ignorance and poverty'.[22] Gandhi had also seen the British interregnum as a sign of interrupted organic development which may well have taken a more 'natural' course. So Independence was celebrated not just as freedom from colonial domination but as the opportunity for a new dawn with a newly created sense of national pride and energies – the central political platform of the Congress Party in fact. Education was represented by Congress as organically linked with national development, the aims of which were a broadly socialist (industrially) modernised country which would become self-supporting.

Although, initially, this took the form of a desperate rush towards urban industrialism reminiscent of the British nineteenth century industrial revolution, its failures soon became apparent and the 'national way' reflecting to an extent Soviet and Chinese models became influential. By the early 1970s, at the height of 'Third World' radicalism, this became a thoroughgoing scepticism about the value of Western approaches. A paper given on behalf of the Ministry of Education in 1974 in a seminar on adult education and national development noted that the old ideas of transferring 'society models' from one part of the world to another, of backward countries 'catching up' with advanced countries, or of 'bridging the gap' between the so-called developing and developed nations were no longer valid.[23] The target may also have included Eastern Europe but was essentially an attack on the high consumption models of growth of Western economists. Instead, education, it was held, should forward the deeper purposes of a humane society based on a concern for the individual's inner life and spiritual harmony, which it added were what Asia's cultural achievements were based on. It seems that this attempted realignment of the notion of 'National Development' was a necessary corrective for the desperate straits of the majority of India's urban and rural poor for whom the rush to industrialisation had only increased their immiseration. Whether the will was there for the appropriate political action was another matter.

Social Education

The dominant post-Independence development in Indian adult education, as noted in Chapter 4, was the concept of social education.

This new concept had of course had its roots in earlier nationalist thinking as the key to a New Social Order and bore a quite emotional charge. Although for many nationalists the British educational system represented a monstrous irrelevance, which simply did not correspond to the real currents of Indian life, in practice much of it was retained. According to C.R. Das the educational system inherited from the British was no more than 'a borrowed and imitated article'.[24] For C.J. Varkey it served a politically destructive order: 'It has no conception of the new co-operative social order, which education must help to bring into existence, to replace the present inhuman and competitive regime based on exploitation and violent force'.[25]

The major innovation of social education, which was the brainchild of Maulam Abdul Kalam Azad, the Minister of Education who formally introduced the term and its application in 1949, was to break the reduction of adult education to literacy training – as Hartog had noted in 1932, 'schools for adults in India are mainly schools for producing literacy'[26] and Professor W.G. Eagleton had remarked on the 'utter inadequacy of universal literacy as an ideal for Indian educationalists'.[27] The nationalist project was to enlarge within it the scope of general education or what it called 'citizenship' education.[28] Through social education Indians would learn how to become useful and industrious citizens and to discover how their own interests were collectively bound up with those of the nation-state. V.S. Jha, president of the IAEA 1956–8, asserted it was now imperative to explain democratic concepts to the masses, who during the independence struggle had been taught to defy colonial authority. It was to be education or, to echo Matthew Arnold, anarchy.

Emphasis on 'social education' was inevitable because introduction of adult franchise and acceptance of a democratic way of life made it imperative to explain to the vast uneducated masses the meaning of the change and to build into their minds a sense of responsibility in participating in the new ways of social and political life. During the struggle of independence masses were educated to defy authority and to destroy institutions created by the then rulers. Habits of mind persisted despite the independence of the country, and they still persist. People have yet to realise that there is no difference between them and the authority, that in a real way they share the authority and the responsibility of it.[29]

Jha's was typical of nationalist thought in seeing education as

the centrally enabling medium to effect a transition from a colonialised society to a modern democratic society, but it continued to represent the people as 'the masses' who had to learn obedience to a new authority. In Azad's original formulation of social education, however, the emphasis was more libertarian. There were five related elements, namely: literacy training, agricultural extension, general education, leadership training and social consciousness. The need for literacy was obvious and was inevitably the part of the programme that absorbed most resources and energy. Agricultural extension was an attempt to disseminate the products of central research to the field. General education attempted to enlarge the minds of men and women beyond the village, where the vast majority of India's population lives, to encompass what was for most of them the novel entity of the nation. This not only included civic rights and responsibilities but the values of hard work, self-reliance, recreation and leisure. This was of course political education in a broad sense and the final two categories increased this element. Leadership training was an attempt to train new village leaders to replace the often unenlightened, by nationalist terms, elders of tradition and was of quite strategic importance. The raising of social consciousness was likewise an attempt to modernise village life and inculcate a group solidarity oriented towards the needs of planned development. In summary, Azad's strategy was to eliminate illiteracy, produce 'broadly educated minds' in India and inculcate the rights and duties of citizenship.

While this seemed to hold out the hopes of a programme of rational social renewal after the prolonged 'subalternity' of the population under the Raj, there were some reservations about the partisan nature of the political education. Moreover, with the introduction a few years later of community development, the social education programme got confused both in concept and operation as a process of community development rather than a specialised extension service.[30]

Originally, the social education programme was run with the help of teachers in village schools, community centres and youth clubs, where they existed. Clubs for women specialised in domestic crafts, nutrition and health problems. Libraries were also introduced or extended, with the intention of providing follow-up resources for the literacy programmes. In the first Five Year Plan it was generally agreed that the progress was spectacular. But then, with the advent of the Community Development programme so-

cial education was divided into 800 blocks, nationally, which were each staffed by two organisers, a man and a woman. It was their job to supervise programmes of literacy work, cultural, recreational and welfare and keep the necessary records of achievement – in the event both massively burdensome and highly unreliable. Bordia records that, by 1955, 83,000 community centres had been established and 169,000 programmes, mostly recreational, had been organised. 53,000 youth clubs, *Mahila Mandals*, young farmers' clubs and *Vika Mandals* were also set up under the first Five Year Plan. Unfortunately, although this is clearly statistically very impressive, it is hard to assess just how permanent or valuable such activity was given the pressure on officials to produce quantifiable results rather than qualitative improvements. The library movement, with assistance from UNESCO, also got underway and there was experimental use of mass media, especially radio. Delhi state pioneered the installation of a radio in every village and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting with local governments installed 22,000 radios nationwide. Film shows and exhibitions toured the country.

Under the second Five Year Plan the main development was the founding of the National Fundamental Education Centre for training, research and information. Resources were put into developing appropriate literature and given to deserving bodies such as the Institute of Workers' Education at Indore. However, it became clear that more than half the states did not use even 50% of the funding for social education, the take-up being particularly low in states with the highest illiteracy.[31] By the end of the plan there were, however, 3,137 community development blocks. This continued into the third Five Year Plan but it was evident that literacy was not making the expected progress and had in fact risen from 17% to only 24% in the first decade of planning. Resources were then suddenly curtailed by the outbreak of war with China and the expectations of the third plan were sidelined.

Despite the almost universal gloom over the failures of the literacy programme there was a bright star over the state of Maharashtra where the remarkable *Gram Shikshan Mohim* project took shape. This programme effectively mobilised villages to develop their own literacy programmes, with impressive results. It was estimated that the increase in the annual numbers of people attaining literacy rose from 3,000 before 1959 to 109,000 in 1961. The success of the programme relied on the total involvement of

the village, culminating in substantial feasting and rejoicing as each village became wholly literate. Another significant development in adult education was the beginning of university adult education programmes, a policy which had been suggested initially, as we have seen, by A.D. Lindsay in the 1930s. These began in Mysore and were followed by similar initiatives in Poona in 1948, Delhi in 1957 and Rajasthan, which, under Dr M.S. Mehta and with Canadian help, developed three sections, in 1960. These of course offered largely liberal and continuing education for the professional classes but were also increasingly drawn into literacy work. University students often 'volunteered' to work in literacy projects but in practice were often rewarded with academic credits for the work they did. Alongside central government projects, very substantial work was done by voluntary agencies, such as those for farmers and workers.

Thus the two decades after Independence produced uneven results. The great successes of the first plan were not matched in successive plans, and by the early 1960s it appeared that government initiatives had run out of steam. It was at this point that the government decided on a radical review of the educational system and an Educational Commission under the chairmanship of Dr Kothari was appointed.

The Report of the Educational Commission (1964–6), otherwise known as the Kothari Commission, was the most far-reaching report of the post-Independence period – and probably one of the most neglected. National development was the central pre-occupation. For Kothari, education was to be the instrument for change, 'if change on a grand scale was to be achieved without violent revolution'.[32] The report renewed and advanced the Nationalist critique that the educational system India had inherited from the British was designed only to meet the needs of an imperial administration within the limitations set by a feudal and traditional society but had to be radically overhauled if it was to serve a democratic socialist society. Taking a militantly workerist line it also did not mince its words about who benefited from the system:

> *education is generally the privilege of the upper classes who are interested, not in working for a living, but in the cultivation of interests which may help them in the enjoyment of life. The educated elite thus become largely parasitical in character and the real productive workers – at a low level of efficiency generally – are the unlettered peasants and artisans.*[33]

Kothari wished to move to a common school system based on the Soviet model and stressed again education's role in rapid modernisation. But he included echoes of the Gandhian critique of the West and stressed some of the virtues of 'traditional' methods adopted in Gandhi's and Tagore's experiments in ashram-based rural education. These were seen as an antidote to the by now increasingly publicised 'moral degeneration' of Western youth (many of whom were now turning up in large numbers on the hippie trail to India). Thus the relatively new stress in the Kothari report was the re-integrating of (a neglected) Gandhian ideology with that of Indian nationalism, of the *Upanishads* with modernity. In what was to become the characteristic language of the 1960s Kothari wrote, 'Atom and Ahimsa, or to put it differently, man's knowledge and mastery of outer space and the space within his skull, are out of balance' and need redressing. 'If science and ahimsa join together in creative synthesis of belief and action, mankind will attain to a new level of purposefulness, prosperity and spiritual insight'.[34]

The commission's prescriptions for adult education were equally ambitious and for the first time acknowledged that adult education existed not merely to transform workers and peasants into useful servants of the state but should also be about 'personal enrichment and professional advancement'. However, the liquidation of illiteracy and the need for economic and social development were uppermost. The report advanced an analysis of the reasons for the failure of illiteracy campaigns in terms of the failure to act in collaboration with other agencies, poor planning and inadequate follow-up. It berated the national leadership for failing to appreciate that the education of illiterates had a direct bearing on economic and social progress and the quality of national life, and noted its lack of political commitment. Literacy was seen as essential to tackling the peasants' resistance to modernisation and a set of strategic targets to 'liquidate' illiteracy was proposed.

It proposed a mass mobilisation of all educated men and women on the lines of the Soviet campaigns and the *Gram Shikshan Mohim* in Maharashtra state. It also recognised the essentially voluntaristic nature of adult education and how essential it was to motivate adults to learn. Women were singled out for special campaigns. The universities were told they must take on a much larger share in the responsibility for educating adults and the report proposed establishing Boards of Adult Education in each university.

But perhaps the most radical proposal was to preclude adult education as the sole concern of one government ministry. Although the Ministry of Education would remain primarily responsible as before, because rigid administrative aloofness had prevented fruitful co-operation in the field it would be 'necessary to adopt procedures which would ensure the practical involvement of the entire administrative machinery'. Kothari's brave attempt to shift the discourse of adult education onto the Gandhian territory of personal and political liberation, however, found few takers.

Bordia concluded that 'in spite of brave declarations, those in authority were unable to find the resources for a meaningful programme of adult education'.[35] Nevertheless, by the early 1970s a wide variety of formal and informal agencies were beginning to appear in adult education. Libraries had taken root in most districts and museums were used as vehicles for adult education. The establishment of agricultural universities had made agricultural extension significant and with the appearance of adult education or extension in most universities adult education had become recognised as an academic discipline.

The true spirit of Kothari's radicalism surfaced only a little over a decade later when the National Adult Education Policy (NAEP) was launched as a result of the government's 1978 review of education. Adult education at this time attracted more attention than ever before.[36] The sixth Five Year Plan as a whole emphasised the need for redistributive justice and the organisation of the rural and urban poor, and within this adult education was perceived to constitute one of the minimum needs of the poorest section of society. It followed in the near revolutionary footsteps of the 1977 declaration from the Ministry of Education that the balance of education in favour of secondary and higher education was to be redressed in favour of primary and adult education. Like Kothari, the NAEP recruited Gandhian ideology and perhaps went even further in attempting to use *nai telim* (Basic Education) concepts in practice. Thus adult education was again re-inscribed in the continuum of working, living and learning. Its aims were to be as always literacy and numeracy but with a re-emphasis on functional development or work-related education, and social awareness or political education. Many features of Non-Formal Education were also included.

Like previous campaigns this identified the target group as the great mass of illiterates in the 15–35 age group, estimated then at

about 100 million. The central government allocated almost 6% of the education budget, from which 386 rural functional literacy programmes were developed. Voluntary agencies were also substantially assisted, along with 49 projects in universities. Although the programme fell sadly short of expectations, it was estimated that by 1981 the literate population had risen to over 36% (as compared with just less than 30% in 1971).

The seventh plan included the familiar commitment to abolish illiteracy, again among the 15–35 age group, and proposed to co-ordinate a mass movement to this end. Much more use was made of voluntary, social and professional groups, including teachers and students. Employers were also required to provide functional literacy training for their employees. The plan targeted rural areas and women, and the network of libraries was to be strengthened and more study centres created. On the whole, the plan differed in its emphasis on greater decentralisation and promotion of non-formal and distance learning.[37]

The Professional Critique

The consensus of opinion amongst Indian commentators was that adult education had not delivered the goods demanded by the nationalists in the heady days of post-Independence. Instead, the British left behind an Indian industrial and governmental elite largely formed in their own image. As early as 1950 students of adult education had noted the potential flaw in this nationalist political perspective. Adult education was not successful because it was imposed from above by 'an intellectual elite which, after a while, failed to get sufficient response from the people'.[38] However, writers like Alikhan still located education centrally in the process of 'nation building':

> *Education in general, and adult education specifically, is now expected to bring millions of young people into the mainstream of the struggle to discover and build the future of nations. This, in my opinion, is the basic task for adult education in the light of direct and indirect correlations between development and education.*[39]

Adult education had come to reflect the twin concerns of literacy and 'national development', but while it was clear what the

first of these concerns entailed, the latter was by no means as uncontentious since it relied on a shifting political assessment. By the early 1970s the concept of adult education as 'social education' had become well-established and its incorporation of elements of civic education, cultural and recreational activities, literacy work, library development, development of folk arts and so on were now accepted. Social education had in turn become fused with 'community development', although perhaps not altogether satisfactorily, through incorporation into community development blocks which now covered community centres, youth clubs, women's organisations, adult literacy centres, farmers' groups and recreation centres. While the programmes achieved a measure of success, Alikhan argued that they neither received sufficient resources nor were adequately organised and administered. India, he believed (prudently supported with a quotation from Indira Gandhi), should adopt the increasingly used notion of 'lifelong education' coupled with a broader system of non-formal practice.

In one of his magisterial assessments of education in the period of post-Independence, written for UNESCO in 1980, J.P. Naik recognised the commendable progress over the last 30 years. But he added two reservations. The first was that in each of the Five Year Plans the achievements had fallen so far short of the needs of the situation that the basic educational crisis had continued. The second was to repeat that most of the gains of the system had gone to the upper and middle classes and the education of the mass of the people had continued to be neglected.[40] The system therefore continued to benefit the class of people by whom it was designed and made only a marginal contribution to the education of the people for whom it was nominally intended. Further, he continued, the 'total injustice of the system and its unpardonable discrimination against the poor' could be evidenced by the facts that about 60% of the people over the age of 10 are still illiterate; 20% of children never attend school at all; 50% of those who do attend drop out by class V; and the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education discriminates against the poor. Naik also drew attention to the fact that the system accords very little priority to adult education or non-formal education which would benefit the masses in general and the poor in particular. On the other hand, the bulk of its resources went into secondary and higher education which benefited only the top 30% of the population. In an eloquent and passionate denunciation of the system, Naik concluded:

> *Therefore, it would be incorrect to describe the existing educational system as an instrument for educating the people ... it is more appropriately designed for not educating the people. In fact the primary objective of the system is not to spread education among the people but to function as an efficient and merciless mechanism to select individuals who should continue to remain in the privileged sector or to enter it afresh ... The main achievement of the system is to condemn the bulk of the children of the common people to be drop-outs and failures and to consign them to a life of drudgery and poverty which has hardly any parallel in the contemporary world or even in our own earlier history.*[41]

Not surprisingly, in suggesting an alternative to this abuse of resources, Naik returned to Gandhi. He argued that the basic objective of a continuing programme of adult education should be to create an awareness among adults about themselves and about the social reality around them. This, he says, is what Gandhi meant when he insisted that political education was an essential component of adult education.

The name 'Gandhi' has become a key coding in contemporary India and invoking his name has become a way of legitimising aspects of social education. Krishna Kumar, for example, believes that the Community Development programme had co-opted Gandhi's terminology for rural education but for basically modernising ends such as new farming methods, women's health programmes, baby care, financial management and so on. While no doubt some of this would have been approved by Gandhi, what was clearly lacking from these programmes was the political dimension. Redistribution of resources, the urban–rural balance, decentralisation of power and decision-making do not seem to have become serious elements of these programmes, although they were central to Gandhi's original politics. In this way, Naik's invoking of Gandhi is a reminder of this political commitment. Kumar also believes that contrary to Gandhi's insistence on the value of the collective, the Community Development programmes, by contrast, have centred on the individual. Throughout the 1960s they created a possessive individualist ideology among farmers by means of capital intensive modernisation, but all the time within the rhetoric of community development and Gandhian philosophy. In reality, the programmes actually resulted in the big farmers being able to use these new and cost-effective resources, with the small farmers left in greater relative poverty.

Because social education and community development could appear in this way not only to have failed the founding intentions but actually to have become counter-productive, the anti-education tide mounted. By the mid-1980s, education had become 'the God that Failed' for some social critics precisely because it reflected the political aspirations of the governing elite rather than the people. From a populist viewpoint A.K. Singh developed a critique of the idea that was fundamental to the Nationalists' belief, that education was a tool for modernisation. He argued that 'the massive expansion of education in post-Independence India has not brought the expected social mobility, social equality and modernisation'.[42] The problem was that modernisation had not been able to distance itself from the market system, with the result that education had become embedded in the 'capitalistic Indian politico-economic structure'. The poor were therefore relatively unprovided for in the allocation of educational resources, despite the fact that education was seen as the God of Development. Singh does not deny the real, massive expansion of education in post-Independence India and the fact that there were now more primary and secondary schools, polytechnics and universities than were dreamed of under the British, that there was substantial scientific education and that literacy had steadily increased, but, he argues, it had simply not effected the structural change necessary for the desired qualitative development of the material and spiritual lives of its people. Neither had adult education been able to acquire an autonomous social identity; it had become merely 'a penance the society has to do for its neglect of its children', but it could not be a substitute for the education of children.[43] Singh concludes, in agreement with J.P. Naik, that in spite of all its brave words to the contrary, education had diluted its commitment to the poor while strengthening the hegemonic control of the elite. Education cannot therefore be the prime mover in social change but depends on changes in the socio-economic system. This is of course a simplification of Marx's base and superstructure argument because it ignores the complex system of mediations between the levels of the economic and the cultural, in which education plays a significant role. But in the sense that it highlights the problem of attempting social change through a superstructural form alone without interfering with the ownership of the means of production and surplus wealth, then it affirms a familiar and oft-proven critique.

The Indian poor are massively deprived and within this huge

mass of the population those in the rural areas are relatively worse off than those in the towns, and women are disadvantaged in comparison with men. The structural imbalances which filter resources off to the middle and upper classes are, however, similar to those in Western economies. None the less, the sheer scale of deprivation and disadvantage in India is incomparable, and the tasks of social restructuring are consequently that much more indomitable. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that despite the co-option of Gandhian populist and democratic rhetoric into the educational debate, only a structural shift of power towards the dispossessed could bring about the context in which the educational reforms advocated could be achieved.

Notes

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3. Quoted in S.C. Dutta, *A History of Adult Education in India* (New Delhi: Indian Adult Education Association, 1988), p. 16.
4. A. Bordia, 'Adult education during the British period and after Independence', in J.R. Kidd and J.A. Draper, eds, *Adult Education in India* (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1973), p. 11.
5. Indeed, a former permanent secretary at the Department of Education of the Indian Government remarked that, although Nehru was a 'very cultured person (he was) not at all interested in education. He had no time for any sort of educational development'. Professor Prem Kirpal, in conversation with Richard Taylor, February 1991.
6. S.A. Shukla, 'Indian educational thought and experiments: a review', in *Comparative Education*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1983, pp. 59–71.
7. D.G. Sumithra, 'A Critical Survey of the Problems of Adult Education in India', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1952, p. 93.
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9. *ibid.*, p. 51.
10. S.Y. Shah, ed., *Each One Teach One: Laubach's materials and methods* (New Delhi: Indian Adult Education Association, 1991), pp. 28–9.

11. *ibid.*, p. 34.
12. Interview with Tom Steele, January 1991.
13. Shukla, 1983, p. 68.
14. Richard Taylor, Kathleen Rockhill and Roger Fieldhouse, *University Adult Education in England and the USA: A reappraisal of the liberal tradition* (Croom Helm, 1985).
15. H. Volken, A. Kumar and S. Kaithathara, *Learning from the Rural Poor* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1982), p. 96.
16. Quoted in Amar Kumar Singh, 'Education and development in India: the god that failed', *Social Change*, vol. 15, no. 3, September 1985, p. 14.
17. Amrik Singh, 'Indian education since 1947: an assessment', *Prospects*, vol. v, no. 3, 1975, p. 313.
18. *ibid.*, p. 314.
19. M.S. Mehta, 'New strategy for adult education in India', *Indian Journal of Adult Education*, vol. 34, no. 3, March 1973, p. 3.
20. C.P.S. Chauhan, 'Education for all: the Indian scene', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol. 9, no. 1, January–March 1990, p. 3.
21. quoted in *ibid.*, p. 11.
22. Mehta, 1993, p. 3.
23. Shahid Alikan, 'Adult education and national development', *Indian Journal of Adult Education*, vol. 35, nos 3–5, 1974, p. 6.
24. quoted in Ernest Green, *Education for a New Society* (Routledge, 1942), p. 150.
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26. Sir Philip Hartog, *The Year Book of Education* (Delhi, 1932), p. 703, quoted in Sumithra, 1952, p. 325.
27. quoted in Sumithra, 1952, p. 327.
28. A. Bordia, in A. Bordia, J.R. Kidd and James Draper, eds, *Adult Education in India: A book of readings* (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1973), p. 24.
29. V.S. Jha, 'Place of adult education in a national educational system', *Indian Journal of Adult Education*, 27, July–August 1964, p. 8.
30. Bordia, 1973, p. 25.

31. *ibid.*, p. 29.
32. The Report of the Educational Commission (1964–6) otherwise known as the Kothari Commission, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Government of India), p. 4.
33. *ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
34. *ibid.*, p. 22.
35. Bordia, 1973, p. 41.
36. A. Bordia, 'The National Adult Education Programme: background and prospects', in A.B. Shah and S. Bhan, eds, *Non-Formal Education and the NAEP* (New Dehli: Oxford University Press, India, 1980), p. 57.
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40. J.P. Naik, *An Assessment of Education Reform in India and Lessons for the Future* (UNESCO, 1980); this summarised the conclusion of Naik's *The Education Commission and After* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1980).
41. Naik, 1980, p. 59.
42. Amar Kumar Singh, 1985, p. 3.
43. *ibid.*, p. 8.

Chapter 5

The Non-Formal Revolution and the National Adult Education Programme

In Indian education every major step forward is, rhetorically, a return to the past. Because of the failures of the successive programmes to create full literacy, the critics of the system invoke the names of the great innovators Azad, Gandhi and Tagore to remind the government of the true way forward in education. In the wake of the student revolts and radicalism of the 1960s not just adult education but the whole system of Indian education was seen to have failed the population. The formal system, largely inherited from the British, was declared to be irrelevant to the needs of a developing nation. Instead, the concept of educational relevance came increasingly to dominate debates and with it the notion of non-formal education. In 1974 the Central Board of Education resolved, after considerable debate, to adopt a programme of non-formal education (NFE) for the first time. It was convinced that the goal of universal education could not be attained through exclusive reliance on the formal system of education because of its inflexible single-point entry, sequential character and need for full-time teachers. The system had a notoriously high drop-out rate, especially high in rural and tribal areas and among women, was inadequate to the functional needs of the population and was expensive and inflexible.

However, the government's primary intention in introducing NFE was to abolish illiteracy within a decade by targeting the 9–14-year-olds. Nine states were declared to be 'educationally backward' and each was allowed the financial resources to establish 500 NFE centres. The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was charged with developing training programmes for the centres. This programme of positive action demonstrated the will of the government to attempt new strategies but the subsequent history of NFE has shown ambivalence about its

exact status: was it complementary to the existing formal system or an alternative to it?

Two kinds of discourses were associated with the programme. On the one hand was the radical discourse which spoke of NFE as a handmaid for political change, as a tool for social rather than personal or economic development, as non-competitive and open-ended and with an emphasis on the quality of life of the learner. It claimed to address the needs of the poor in relation to social justice and access to resources. The other discourse was economic. NFE was cost-effective and inexpensive, especially for sparsely populated areas, where learners would normally have to travel long distances to a fixed institution with permanent staff. Under NFE a mobile staff could take education out to communities. Voluntary organisations, many already in the field, could undertake the work more cheaply than government bodies. The education itself would be work-related and functional rather than abstract and generally improving. Because the discourses could be understood by the activist on the one hand and the administrator on the other, a somewhat uneasy alliance was struck to deliver the programme. This has not, however, relieved it of political contention, as we shall see later.

The activists perceived the programme as a part of a movement for the oppressed, with the twin objectives of development and liberation. Women in particular had been neglected by the formal system and so became a special object of voluntary group activities. R.P. Singh argued that the roots of NFE emanated from a variety of religious and political philosophies but in particular lay closest to the fundamentals of humanism.[1] NFE, he thought, approximating to a resolution of Greek, modern and Hindu humanisms, had the potential to release the divine within us.

One of the ironies of the introduction of non-formal education into the Indian system was that, although it was informally developed with the help of UNESCO in the late 1960s with adults in functional literacy schemes, the emphasis was on younger people.[2] Because non-formal education under the fifth plan was seen to be all-embracing, the relatively specific character of adult education was beginning to disappear. One of the most committed foreign specialists in Indian adult education, Alan Rogers, now of Reading University, has written an impressive but unfortunately unpublished survey of NFE in which he draws attention to this dilemma. NFE, as Rogers points out, has a dual character in that it attempts

to be both a total system of education which would in the end embrace formal education, and a specific programme within the educational system. It was intended that in the long view the whole of the Indian formal system should take up NFE priorities such as flexible entrance, relevant curricula, discontinuous attendance and a developmental orientation. In the short run, however, it was to be a specific programme running alongside formal education aimed at the children of the rural and urban poor.

On one view, NFE was to embrace everything, including adult education, because it was considered that it was not helpful to view the education of adults as distinct from that of children. Rogers argues that by the end of the fifth plan the distinctiveness of adult education was disappearing, signalled in the new title of the Directorate for Non-Formal (Adult) Education where 'adult' is merely a subset of non-formal.[3]

In fact, the specificity of adult education within NFE was the subject of much debate. What tied it into the overall programme was the problem of illiteracy. Since NFE targeted illiteracy in young people, it seemed obvious that adult education should be incorporated, but it was recognised that adults required distinct approaches and materials. Singh believed that some sort of overall linkage was desirable and reported at length on the various administrative models proposed, in which NFE, formal and adult education could be married. In the most attractive model, NFE and adult education were linked through a common directorate, leaving formal education separate. The main recommendation for this was that formal educational structures had already failed and would be inadequate to run such an innovative scheme. Both the bureaucracy and the elitism of formal education would foil the necessary flexibility and orientation of the scheme. NFE and adult education were both aimed at learners in productive work and could work best through a dynamic, project-based approach. Reservations about this model lay in the need to understand the distinctiveness of adult psychology and needs, and also the articulation of NFE and adult education into the system as a whole. Would it be merely a marginal adjunct giving a second-class education for the poor or would it divert major resources towards them and enable them ultimately to enjoy greater access to higher education? Although these problems were not entirely resolved, adult education was understood as an important element within the overall developmental orientation of education. Rogers noted a significant shift away

from purely economic criteria, such as greater production, to social ones and the improvement of the quality of life. He also notes the slow growth of interest in participatory learning. Roby Kidd's *How Adults Learn* had been translated for the Indian context but few had followed this lead.

Origins of the NAEP

The National Adult Education Policy was an attempt to define the peculiar role of adult education within the consensus on NFE. It began as a political response to the failure of the educational system as a whole to respond to and develop the needs of the poorest sections of society, particularly women, the rural poor and tribal people. Discussions held in 1977 criticised the concentration of educational resources at the higher and secondary levels and resolved to reverse the pattern so that basic and adult education would be given a far higher percentage of the budget. Even within adult education it was argued that the rural poor had lost out to the industrial urban workers, though they got precious little. However, it was clear that literacy was much higher in the cities than in the country and also much higher among men than women, with the consequence that the most neglected sector of the population were rural women.

The *Gram Shikshan Mohim* Village Education movement of 1961–3 in Maharashtra state had however shown what successes could be achieved in the country given the necessary political commitment. This scheme had at its height created 100% literacy in the 14–50 age group in over 1,100 villages and achieved a literacy rate 10% above the national average in the state as a whole, reaching nearly 45% in 1971. But because of the lack of post-literacy programmes to consolidate the learning, the relapse rate was massive (and in some cases an over-enthusiastic way with statistics had augmented the original results).

When in 1977 the priorities of the sixth Five Year plan were being debated, the success of movements like *Gram Shikshan* influenced the shift of the balance of resources to elementary and adult education. This significant and momentous decision gave rise to the NAEP. For the first time the government approved a substantial element of devolution of the responsibility for delivery to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or voluntary groups, recognising in effect that many such schemes were already under-

way. The NAEP also created the first system for administering these many and various schemes. After a very wide debate which went beyond the official bodies and into the country, it was adopted.

One sign that the NAEP was to be more than a just a rejigged version of previous schemes was the invocation of the name of Gandhi. By centring the scheme on the fusion of working, living and learning, which were central to Gandhi's system of Basic Education, the authors were signalling their radical reorientation of priorities. They also stressed the importance of the learning environment and the needs of the individual learner. They attempted to build in flexibility of course length and meeting arrangements around the learner and promoted diversity in curriculum and learning materials. Once again the discourse of 'education as liberation' was deployed but this time linking the ancient wisdom of India with radical post-colonial development practices. As Bordia commented:

> *In conformity with the ancient Indian adage, sa vidya ya vimuktaye ('that is true knowledge which liberates') which finds an echo in many a recent thinker, education under the NAEP is viewed as a means towards man's liberation. Again it follows Gandhi, Tagore and Julius Nyerere in emphasising the importance of the development of the people it serves as the only means for the development of the country.*[4]

Thus the corralling of history, modern heroes of the liberation struggle and development techniques represented the desire for a radical political outcome to the programme. Conceptually, the programme was to link three aspects together:

1. literacy and numeracy
2. functional development
3. social awareness.

Originally, Gandhi's idea of Basic Education had intended such a fusion, and indeed social education had incorporated this in its earliest framing. But the point was to go beyond 'mere' literacy work to political consciousness, much as Paulo Freire had done in South America. Indeed, Freire's influence was to strengthen noticeably over the following decade as his concept of the 'Pedagogy

of the Oppressed' became more widely understood.

To indicate the dynamic character of the new programme there was a shift away from the older community development (CD) organisation of 'blocks' to projects. Although they were in some way coterminous, the project was not bound by geographical divisions and was healthily inter-departmental, so that Ministries other than Education were brought into the organisation and funding procedures. The project was to centre on an environmentally common area so that it could be treated as a single unit. It was to be led by a Project Officer with a supervisor responsible for 20–30 adult education centres. It was hoped that the new administrative system would cut through the corruption and bureaucratic incompetence associated with much of the existing CD apparatus.

Another attempt to by-pass the bureaucracy was in giving the responsibility for delivery to voluntary organisations. Indeed, 'voluntarism' also extended largely to the literacy teachers, who were to be paid only a small honorarium of 50 rupees monthly for the work, and although schoolteachers were not actually forced to take part in the scheme they were 'strongly encouraged' to do so. This step in the direction of greater recognition and involvement of voluntarism was in some respects simply coming to terms with what was happening in the field. The state was now attempting to catch up with the civil sector and also come into line with it.

For the first time a systematic network of support was built up throughout the country to co-ordinate the schemes along with state resource centres for training volunteer agents. It was arguably the first time that the proper political commitment was given to a major shift of resources from the wealthier sections of education to the deprived, modest though it was. However, the intended use of voluntary organisations led to accusations that the project would be used for party political ends, with the result that a number of new 'non-political' NGOs were created. Nevertheless, the fact that the programme was so flexible meant that virtually anything could be done and both political cadres and religious groups took advantage of the opportunity offered. Further excitement was added in that, in the change from the geographically static element of 'block' to the dynamic one of 'project' which crossed administrative boundaries, no one was really sure where the district campaign might lead.[5]

The NAEP was, then, one of the most ambitious and revolutionary adult education programmes to be launched. When it came into operation in autumn 1978 the intention was to provide educa-

tion for one million adults between the ages of 15 and 30 within five years. The programme itself would be the occasion for mass mobilisation of the population around the issues of citizenship and development rather than simply another bureaucratic and professionally led initiative in which the initial reforming zeal would inevitably be lost within official procedures.

The three conceptual elements of awareness, literacy and functionality, on which the programme was based, operated in broad terms in the following way. The programme envisaged that the adult learners could in the first instance be made aware of the causes of the conditions in which they lived and that since those conditions were caused not simply by 'fate' or destiny but had material causes, action could be taken to change them. This was seen as a form of empowerment. Learners were taught not only about the existing laws covering their lives but also the rights and benefits accruing to individuals, communities and society.[6] Learners, therefore, found out not only what was expected of them by the state but what they in turn could expect of the state.

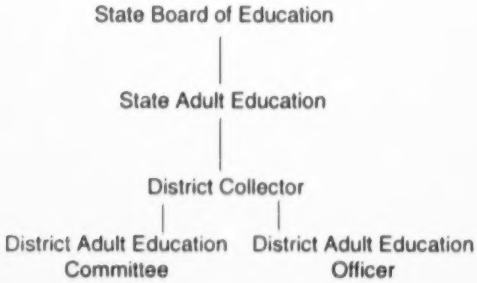
Learners were then encouraged to function more effectively both in their personal lives and in their work. This involved upgrading of skills to improve economic conditions, health care, family welfare and how to discharge civic responsibilities. For the masses of the poor who had emigrated from the country to the towns in search of ever elusive better prospects, the programme offered ways of adjustment to the changing conditions. These ends were to be through an expanded view of the literacy programme itself, with obvious overtones of Freire's *conscientisation* literacy strategies. In a rough taxonomy of the aims of the programme, suggested by Dutta, it was to be:

1. relevant to the environment's and the learner's needs
2. flexible in respect of duration, time, location, and instructional arrangements
3. diversified with regard to curriculum, teaching and learning materials and methods
4. systematic in all aspects of organisation.[7]

Five modes of literacy programme were to be used: literacy with assured follow-up provision to prevent relapses, conventional functional literacy, functional literacy programmes supportive of a

dominant development programme, literacy with learning-cum-action groups and finally, literacy for conscientisation and formation of organisations for the poor.

Priority was to be given to women and 'tribals' or members of scheduled groups and each learner was expected to spend 300–60 hours or nine to 10 months at an adult education centre. The new administrative structure was revised and now had the following format:



This structure superseded the old Community Development chain of command and made it more possible to involve other governmental departments – some of which, like the Mobile Orientation and Training Team (MOTT), were clearly brought in to instigate radical innovations.

The NAEP differed from previous schemes in a number of respects. In the first instance it made a priority of the need for training the volunteers effectively and made provision for it. It also provided much greater administrative and resource support. It moved further away from an abstract and centrally conceived curriculum which put governmental priorities first, and tried instead to achieve a more needs-based orientation. A radical innovation was the imposition of much stricter evaluation, which was to be carried on at all stages and was intended to replace the habitual and deeply suspect practices of collecting statistics on which assessment had been based previously. More responsibility for inspection and supervision was given to the project staff rather than the senior officers, who might have used less subtle methods of evaluation. In addition, the whole scheme was to be appraised by the Institute of Social Science Research.[8] Rather than the old system of numerical

targets, the new emphasis was to be on process. As Bordia notes, in previous programmes target results were often a matter of creative arithmetic:

> *Reliance on quantified reports is a matter of habit with the administration. While such reliance may be appropriate in the case of industrial production or power generation, it is altogether unsatisfactory in respect of programmes whose prime purpose is to influence and improve the quality of people's lives.*[9]

Adult education functionaries were now being asked to make a sincere effort to effect social change instead of worrying about statistical results.

The NAEP was therefore a radical, and many believed potentially revolutionary, departure from previous programmes. Its core strategy of attending to the minimum needs of the poor in order to enable them to influence their own future, looked to many in the elite deeply subversive and adult educators warned at the time of the need for genuine political commitment by the state to ensure its success. The decision to hand over much of the delivery of the programme to the voluntary bodies and to decentralise decision-making implied a critique of government mismanagement and corruption: and this political sub-text was noted by government.

A Review Committee, again under Dr D.S. Kothari, was appointed in October 1979 to report on the first year of the NAEP and to recommend changes for more effective implementation. Kothari believed that the programme should have been viewed as a joint learning project of the educated and the illiterate in which each could learn from the other, but that 'this was hardly recognised by the functionaries of the programme and that it was poorly reflected in the working of the centres'.[10] He recommended that nothing should be done to weaken the momentum generated in the community and that steps should be taken radically to strengthen and modify the programme. The first of these was the establishment of an autonomous National Board of Adult Education which would be responsible for planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and research.

Broadly speaking, Kothari strengthened the emphasis of the original intentions of the programme but added that the target subjects should be districts with a lower than average literacy rate, women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, migrant labourers and other 'weaker sections of the community'. More students should

be enlisted in the scheme as 'volunteers' and more grant aid should be given to voluntary organisations to enlist their support. More attention should be paid to post-literacy programmes and more use should be made of electronic media and 'folk media' to increase motivation.

The programme, he argued, should be implemented in three structured phases. The first should be of about 300–50 hours, which could cover basic literacy, general education including health and family planning, and vocational/functional programmes. The second phase should cover about 150 hours, in which learners would have literacy skills reinforced, particularly in relation to daily usage, and would also find out about practical environmental science, geography and cultural history. Vocational skills would be reinforced and understanding of supplementary employment in such village industries as dairying, poultry and piggery would be encouraged. Learners would also be encouraged to form discussion groups to organise developmental action. The last phase, a programme of about 100 hours, would aim to achieve a reasonable degree of self-reliance in literacy and 'functionality'. This was the first time such a coherent and reflective literacy strategy had been planned and, recognising the programme's ambitious fetch, Kothari warned:

> *Success will depend on firm and sustained political commitment , development of the programme as a nation-wide movement and linking it with improvements in the standards of living of the poor, involvement of the educated persons and educational and other institutions of social services, harnessing the best talent available to improve the quality of the programme, creation of an efficient and decentralised administration and the provision of the needed resources. It is a deep concern for these basic issues which should inspire the development of the programme in the days ahead.*[11]

Critical Voices

The NAEP was positively if cautiously welcomed by adult educationists, not because they disputed the politics of the programme but because they were not convinced that India's ruling elite would allow it to take effect. If carried through it would entail a major social upheaval in India and possibly, some warned, a social revolution. James Draper, one of the father figures of comparative adult

education, noted that decisions about education and development are by their nature political acts. 'For the first time in India's history', he wrote, 'there does appear to be a political will at the national level to seriously take up the challenge of poverty, under-education and human resource development'.[12] Because the NAEP's programme was so clearly political in the broader sense of redistributing resources to the poor mass of India's population and couched in the terms of social justice and enlightenment, there would be strong opposition from the possessing minority who ruled India. The attempt by the programme to roll the wheel of balance between those with power, wealth and education to those without would inevitably be resisted and the resistance would be based, Draper believed, on tradition, the control of power, superstition, custom and the undue risks in making changes.

Convinced that the ruling elite would not let such political changes happen, he believed that the real transformation would be an 'internal' one, which would affect the individuals involved. He felt that the programme would have worked if it delivered the belief and the energy for social change within the innermost selves of those involved, presumably in a non-violent fashion. What was most desirable was for a 'learning society' to develop in India such that the value of learning was cherished and interwoven into the cultural fabric of the society. Draper advanced the argument that education and learning were essential elements of development. The development worker, therefore, should think of every way in which each act of development, from building a village community centre to adult literacy classes, should maximise the opportunity for learning outcomes for the individuals involved. Inquiry, dialogue and self-direction would be the keys to these outcomes, of which the goals should be self-awareness, critical thinking and consciousness-raising. Not surprisingly, Draper invoked Gandhi to bring the message home: 'Adult education should not be confined to literacy programmes alone but should also aim at the emancipation of the masses from the squalor of superstition and the tyranny of taboos'.[13] Significantly, he felt the success of the NAEP would depend on the Non-Governmental Organisations which, because of their programmes in rural and urban areas, were closer to the people, who had greater trust in them than in the government officials.

Some left-wing criticism of the programme was directed at the role of Non-Formal Education which, although it appeared to offer more means for radical and critical approaches, was regarded as

education on the cheap. The traditionally privileged class would continue to patronise the formal system of education, while the parallel system of NFE was aimed specifically at the poor majority. Thus, the argument ran, although NFE had this radical appearance it tended in fact to adjust to if not actually to strengthen existing class divisions. Not only was it confined to the underprivileged but within that context it succeeded in educating only the better placed economically and socially. The leading proponent of this tendency, S.C. Shukla, argued that 'although in principle, non-formal education offers a structure and a situation more open to radical social influences than does the formal system, in practice, the dominance of the contemporary state and the upper classes is more likely'.[14]

Shukla was exercised by the question of who would ultimately control the direction of the NFE programme since non-formal education implied 'a direction which is consciously willed' and an attempt to turn society in a definite direction. What social groups linked to what economic and political bases informed by what sets of ideas would in the end determine it? Shukla implied that to regard NFE as inherently radical or capable of radical transformation was naive in that the influence of the socially dominant group was bound to outweigh the subaltern interests. So he advocated in a neat twist of Freire's original phrase 'a pedagogy of the oppressor', in which the dialectic of education's inherent ability to act both as an instrument of liberation and of oppression could be analysed. Although his own pessimistic, Marxian conclusion was that 'knowledge tends to correspond to the world view and interests of the dominant social strata', he seems to leave a space for a radical will to turn NFE into an instrument in favour of the people. If, however, it were to fail to take the initiative it might then become even more oppressive than formal education.

A central problem with NFE was that there was no reason why it too would not rapidly become as formalised and institutionalised as the system it sought to replace. In fact, it might become simply a re-formalisation of existing practices rather than a means of deconstructing them. Shukla inclined to the view that NFE, like the systems of adult and social education that preceded it, without political vigilance, would 'further accentuate the schism between the various sections of society, the educated and the not-so-educated'.[15] He concluded that the 'development-orientated approach to literacy and non-formal education' despite its avowed intention

to address the conditions of the poorer communities, actually confined education to the privileged sections of society and left the majority untouched. He believed that only Freire's approach to literacy work, which involved raising political consciousness, could be adequate to India's problems. But even this was not sufficient in itself, since in the end education could only be the handmaiden to, not the replacement of, social revolution.

Given the clear failure of adult education programmes since Independence to shift substantially resources or power to the mass of the dispossessed classes, or even to fulfil the rhetorical demands for full literacy, so loudly proclaimed at the beginning of each new campaign, Shukla's criticisms could not be lightly dismissed. However, they bore the traces of a kind of overly pessimistic and mechanical historical determinism which suggests that any system of education, no matter how radical the impulse, will in the end serve the interests of the dominant elite. This in turn suggests that no amount of energy spent on education can be radically productive and must be misplaced. And yet radicals still believe in the potency of education for social transformation, and indeed it seems impossible to imagine a more socially just and democratic society without a developed educational system. Is this intellectual and political commitment simply misplaced?

J.P. Naik agreed in part with Shukla about the class nature of the Indian educational system. Lest anyone take a romanticised nationalist view of this, he was at pains to point out, this was *not* simply the product of British imperialism but long pre-dated it.

Indian society in the early nineteenth century was traditional, feudal, caste-dominated and highly inegalitarian. All intellectual learning and political and economic power were concentrated in a few leading castes at the top, while the vast bulk of the people lived in great poverty, deprived of most of the good things of life. The total learning system of the day was in consonance with this social order and was in fact designed to consolidate and perpetuate it.[16]

The principal strength of this system, which incorporated incidental, non-formal and formal elements, was that it was virtually free of state interference and conducted by individuals, families and voluntary bodies in such a way that each was prepared for his or her station in life. Its obvious drawbacks were that the life roles available to people were determined by gender and caste and its outcomes were stagnation and perpetuated inequality.

As we noted in our opening chapters, with the arrival of the British, the system underwent some degree of modernisation, but the British saw fit to leave the incidental and non-formal sub-systems, which really educated the vast masses of the people, intact and merely reform the formal system. The main objective of the modernised formal system had been to spread Western science and literature through the medium of the English language. But even here the very narrow objectives of the British were plainly inadequate. The British wished to create only 'a small class of intermediaries or interpreters between them and the people over whom they ruled' in the hope that culture and education would automatically filter down to the masses in due course, but this merely led to 'the almost exclusive emphasis on the spread of Western science and literature through the English language and the almost total neglect of all indigenous learning; and the unwillingness, for political reasons, to disturb the traditional social and religious life of the people'.[17] The consequence of the British intervention between 1813 and 1921 was therefore only to accentuate the division between the now partially modernised upper classes and the traditionally impoverished masses. Naik believed that, if anything, the gap between the level of education of the masses and that of the elite is even wider than it was 60 years ago.

Far from alleviating this imbalance, he continued, attempts to introduce new forms of non-formal education had failed miserably. English and Indian language newspapers were read only by the elite, the library movement had not developed and even television was largely urban and elite centred. Agricultural extension had reached some of the better-off farmers but the family planning programme which was aimed specifically at the poor had had no impact. Like Shukla, Naik concluded, 'All things considered, one can say that even modern programmes of non-formal education benefited only the upper and middle classes and the rural rich or well-to-do, and that they have done little to educate and modernise the poor or to improve their standard of living'.[18]

Neither could the inadequacies of the non-formal system be rectified by the formal system since, for a number of reasons, no amount of expansion would make the elementary school system adequate to Indian needs. The elementary school relied far too heavily on a Western model of single point entry, full-time attendance and annual sequential promotion, which has little relevance to the Indian situation. Non-formal education, therefore, which has

flexible entry, relevant curriculum, part-time study and recognises the undeniable role children have to play in the domestic economy has had to try to make up the deficit.

Unlike Shukla, Naik held that a coherent and properly modernised system of non-formal education could be effective but that it required a marked change of attitude towards the poor. In the first place middle-class paternalism, which enabled a few of the poor to escape on a path of upward mobility, offered no prospects for the poor as a whole. Instead, the content of education had to be related to and organised around the day-to-day problems of the poor and positively oriented towards development for all. But like Shukla, Naik questioned whether the political and social climate necessary for structural changes is evident. He concluded that not only is the social revolution not in sight but that the effervescence created by the Janata Party's victory in 1977, which introduced the NAEP, had already evaporated by the 1980s. All that could be expected for the next decade was political instability and grave economic difficulties in which governments would be rather more concerned with their own survival than massing the energy to pursue development strategies. With this prospect in view Naik considered whether, as Shukla seemed to be suggesting, transferring energy from the educational to the revolutionary front was not in the end more effective. But he did not pursue this option, on the grounds that it would only strengthen the hold of the reactionary forces. Instead, he addressed himself to the problem of the 'change agents' necessary to make a programme of non-formal education possible. Keeping out political parties and trade unions from the process might well be to deprive the programme of greater effectiveness. Voluntary organisations offered a partial solution but were not widely enough distributed over the country and in many cases suffered the same defects of bureaucracy as government agencies.

Naik also felt that the resources of higher education had not been utilised sufficiently in the development of non-formal education initiatives. The training of change agents was seriously lacking and university students, for example, could be used in this process. More seriously, university intellectuals seemed to be uninterested in the problems and had not applied themselves to providing or investigating solutions to non-formal education. Because of its lack of social relevance, higher education should, Naik believed, be relieved of a proportion of its income (the majority of

which he anyway believed to be wasted) and the funding diverted to adult education.

In an eloquent, if despairing, conclusion to his argument Naik recognised that opposition to the programmes of large-scale non-formal education have come from all sides of the political spectrum. Whilst their ideologies and vested interests conflict, there remained, nevertheless, a scandalous complicity of left and right, united in their opposition to redistributing educational resources to the poor. The revolutionists underestimated the potential of the proposals for radical reform, while the ruling group would take the opportunity to divert much of the resources to their own pockets. While such a structural imbalance of wealth exists in India, with a very wealthy top fraction and the bottom half of the country living below the poverty line, Naik could see little more in the optimistic initiatives of the sixth plan than a step in the right direction. As one of the most respected radical voices in Indian education, Naik's is a serious and sober assessment. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, the reorientation towards NFE and the consequences of the NAEP have ushered in a variety of often radical schemes and projects, mostly in the voluntary sector, which have put a new complexion on India's adult education system. It has opened the door to a radical agenda which includes the education of women as a priority, within an overall context of functional and participatory education.

Notes

1. R.P. Singh, *Non-Formal Education: An alternative approach* (Bombay: Sterling, 1987), p. 12.
2. Alan Rogers, 'Knowledge and Power: A Case Study of the Role of the University in Adult Education', unpublished typescript, 1978, p. 166.
3. *ibid.*, p. 172.
4. A. Bordia, 'The National Adult Education Programme: background and prospects' in A.B. Shah and Susheela Bhan, *Non-Formal Education and the NAEP* (New: Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 64.
5. Interview with Professor C.J. Daswani, Leeds, 1991.
6. S.C. Dutta, *A History of Adult Education in India* (New Delhi: Indian Adult Education Association, 1988), p. 115.
7. *ibid.*, p. 116.

8. Bordia, 1980, p. 67.
9. *ibid.*, p. 80.
10. Quoted in Dutta, 1986, p. 119.
11. *ibid.*, p. 127.
12. James A. Draper, 'Legislation, learning and legitimisation' in Shah and Bhan, 1980, p. 95.
13. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 100–1.
14. S.C. Shukla, in Shah and Bhan, 1980, p.16.
15. *ibid.*, p.20.
16. J.P. Naik, 'Non-formal education in India: a retrospect and a prospect', in Shah and Bhan, 1980, p. 223.
17. *ibid.*, p. 225.
18. *ibid.*, p. 227.

Chapter 6

Post-NAEP: Radical Populism and the New Social Movements

With the demise of the Janata Party the momentum in adult education passed to the devolved organisations which had been set up or stimulated by the NAEP. One of the virtues of the programme was in establishing a much more decentralised administrative structure which to an extent managed to by-pass the traditional corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency of the old system. The protocols now in place allowed much greater responsibility at local level and relied on greater inter-departmental co-operation than before.

In the late 1970s a new infrastructure for adult education was established which included the notion of the District Resource Unit. The DRUs, about 200 of which were established, brought the organisational level down from that of the state to the district. As well as adult education, their function was to look after the non-formal education in out-of-school hours of children, mostly up to the age of 14, who for various reasons did not attend school. The link with adult education had proved valuable because it improved resources and further established the importance of non-formal work with adults. The DRU was one of the most important administrative changes in the delivery of adult education.

After 1985 central government once more turned its attention to adult education and established what was called the National Literacy Mission. The NLM adopted the radical approach of looking beyond literacy education to identify the social impediments to literacy. It looked at the quality of the school buildings, lighting, resources and writing materials and brought the necessary departments together to repair and refurbish. According to Professor Daswani, it thus became a movement for social reconstruction.[1] The NLM was funnelled into district campaigns which worked on this inter-departmental level under a joint secretary. The campaigns themselves relied on a high level of voluntary support,

much of which came from young people, often university graduates who had completed their degrees but were not yet fully employed; how much coercion was involved is difficult to say. In many other cases, the voluntarism came from activists committed to the political plight of the poor. The campaigns in each district, which were taken from village to village, began in a carnival atmosphere, with processions, meetings and singing and dancing. The 'Dawn Movement' would go around in the morning singing religious songs and drawing people, many of whom were children, to the adult education centre, where they would sign up for education in an atmosphere reminiscent of religious revivalism. In 1986 these changes were formalised in the National Policy of Education (NPE) which published a number of documents on the themes of 'Challenges to Education' and a 'Programme of Action'.

The formal changes disguised a substantial alteration in atmosphere and approach which had begun with the development of the NAEP in the politically-charged atmosphere of the late 1970s. A number of aspects were invloved. Firstly, the policy of decentralisation had freed the programmes from a good deal of the departmental rivalry and bureaucracy of earlier campaigns. The arm's-length funding of voluntary agencies had released new energies, many of them politically radical, and attracted large numbers of young idealists, often bearing the Freirean torch of 'conscientisation'. New groups were targeted. Although these were mainly drawn from the rural poor, the tribal populations, or 'tribals', now attracted particular attention. Perhaps most important was the attention given specifically to the problem of women's education both in the country and in the towns. Sponsored often by large international and overseas agencies, innovative and creative programmes of work with women drew much of their inspiration and methods from the (Western) women's movement. Many of these controversial new projects predictably drew fire from local vested interests.

MOTT and People's Power

Typical of the new radicalism was the Mobile Orientation and Training Team (MOTT), whose function was to travel round the villages and train voluntary instructors. The leaders of this team saw themselves in a frankly political light as the agents of 'People's Power'. They believed that the NAEP had foundered because

of the opposition of vested interests who 'wanted the masses of the people to remain in a position of submission, deprived of a literate culture of their own'.[2] The team was heavily influenced by Paulo Freire's work in Brazil and they believed that a distinct 'pedagogy of the oppressed' had developed in India since the initiation of the NAEP in 1977, in which the poor had for the first time been able to evaluate themselves without reference to the higher castes (that is as an oppressed class). Using characteristically Freirean language they argued that the people had been able to 'arrive at the fundamental discovery of the prevailing power structure and the ideas dominant in society as the very negation of their humanity'.[3] From this insight the people would, in theory, awaken to a historic consciousness and struggle for social justice.

The team, not surprisingly, at first met with a great deal of scepticism from workers experienced with the rural poor who doubted the capacity of *harijans* to manage their own lives. They were able, however, to effect a regional organisation which in a year established 250 adult education centres in six districts through which they could study the local needs and motivate and train instructors. Despite the Freirean rhetoric, most of the on-going projects were described as 'functional literacy programmes', while others were aimed quite specifically at 'people's awakening and organisation'. The trainees were selected in a manner which would have been envied by the nineteenth century missionary. Only those with deep conviction and commitment to the people were recruited, who were then sent on a 'short exposure programme' to distant places to help them understand the exacting nature of the task. The trainees would then return to their own district or village to constitute a core team of agents/instructors. MOTT believed that this core team should be drawn from the social group most likely to benefit from the actual programme and not from those with more formal education, who were more likely to be culturally alienated from the target group. The training programme for the core team, which lasted for two weeks, appeared to be at least as political as it was functional.

The key term in both the training programme and the educational experience was participation. Initially, the members of the core team would spend a half day pooling their experiences of the rural poor in their region and clarifying their own observations, experience and reflections. The participants were drawn from that sector and were asked to articulate the nature of the 'exploitative

mechanisms' affecting social existence, 'the role of landlords, moneylenders, officials and political bosses', ending by drawing up a list of priority problems of the poor and oppressed in their area. The role of the trainer was then to 'initiate the participants into a systematic framework of socio-political analysis' in which they could more meaningfully interpret their discussions. Then the possibilities were investigated of involving the people in participatory research, 'by which the adult educators and the people would progress in a critical understanding of their poverty through guided reflection on their experience'.[4] Hence this form of participation involved a high degree of 'guidance' from the trainers in political and educational theory which the participants could not be expected to have learned through their own experience. Nevertheless, experience did seem to play a large role in the project. In the first instance it was clear that merely persuading people to have an adult education centre established in their village was no guarantee that it would be used. The percentage of drop-outs was very high and often the centre soon closed down. The core team would have to concentrate on the problem of motivation: how could they get the villagers to own the need for education, which in the normal course of things was low down on their living priorities? The group's solution was the use of popular cultural forms in the shape of songs and short dramas 'that bring out the importance of people's education and the disastrous consequences of ignorance and illiteracy'.[5] The villagers then 'demand' an adult education centre and set up a committee to be responsible for it and choose those from among themselves who should receive training as instructors. Thus the centre comes not as a gift from the outside but as a response to the demands of the villagers themselves, who then have control over it and make it their own. That at all events was the theory and it seems, at least in part, to have been successful. Texts from Freire and Nyerere, whom the MOTT team regarded as the most outstanding thinkers in adult education, provided the basic theoretical material. Heavy emphasis was placed on Nyerere's humanistic beliefs in the capacity of human beings to transform themselves, in the light of new perceptions of themselves and social reality, views Nyerere had developed both at Ruskin College, Oxford, and in the Tanzanian 'nation-building' project of the 1970s. Following Freire's more existential/phenomenological approach, the team's central methodology was 'action-reflection', which they characterised as 'a new way of living responsibly in

solidarity'. Freirean dialogics was the key technique in the teaching. Villagers would be asked to imagine a situation around such central elements in their lives as 'debt'. A picture of a poor man approaching a money lender helps them to focus their attention and they are asked to explain what is going on and what are the consequences. The word 'debt' is then written on the board and villagers are asked to construct simple sentences using it. Then a discussion is opened up about what can be done about it. In this way literacy is organically linked with questioning problems which arise from the villagers' real lives rather than the idealised worlds constructed in more orthodox literacy material. This was further reinforced by the 'learning-by-doing' approach of the instructors' training programme, in which the trainees have to create their own material based on their experience of the locality and play the role of instructor to the trainee group.

Thus the post-NAEP period is characterised by a much greater attention to the detail of training the literacy teams rather than expecting them to use pre-formed materials devised without knowledge of the realities of the local circumstances. The training techniques, significantly, owed their authenticity to the work of adult education in other Third World countries, rather than the industrialised West. Although Nyerere owed something to his time at Ruskin and Freire to his existentially-formed Marxism, the key fact was that the techniques had actually been developed in the field rather than in the academy. There was no doubt, too, that the overtly political cast of the training had a galvanic effect on the trainees, since it elevated the tedious particularity of literacy work into the heroic status of liberation struggle. How far the actual acquisition of reading and writing skills took precedence over political discussion is an interesting question.

Voluntary and Non-Governmental Organisations

The MOTT team were frankly less interested in the short-term literacy outcomes of the work than the political effect they had. They addressed themselves to the question of just how disinterested or effective voluntary organisations could be in the face of a class society. Could they become a social force for building a new, classless society? Were voluntary organisations really radically different from the strongly hierarchical structure of the NAEP? How could such structures be replaced by more egalitarian ones?

They were also concerned about the hostile response of vested interests to the centre, which, if it was working well, was creating a militant labouring class. There is an uneasy feeling that in the structure of the MOTT projects the lowly part-time village instructor would be left at the mercy of the village power-brokers when things got rough and the core team was urged to keep 'deep contact' with the villages.

For MOTT the adult education centre was to be one of the forces in the villages pressing for change, but it could not be expected to transform village life on its own. They quote the example of a successful programme in a Murupetta village in which the whole community of rope-workers took collective action. Here the centre was linked with the community, the women's organisation and the youth club and the people's education resulted from the interaction of these four structures. The conclusion, they believed, was obvious: to be successful, adult education needs first an instructor deeply involved in the life and struggles of the people. Secondly, he or she needs the constant support of core team members who are themselves identified with the people, effective in communication and possessing organisational skills.

Women's Liberation and the Critique of Development

The radical populism and emphasis on training implicit in MOTT's approach in the late 1970s and early 1980s was complemented by other radical agenda as the decade progressed. The women's movement threw up activists who brought into play the techniques of consciousness-raising groups and a developed critique of patriarchal power structures. This gave rise to a widespread critique of 'development' as such, a sensitivity to ecological problems and a focus on the needs of women as a specific target group. Participatory methods became subtler than those used by MOTT and the focus on (male) political educational theory was downplayed in favour of a more libertarian, experientially-based learning, derived from the women's movement. Many elements of the older, class-based radical critique were retained and refined.

Kamla Bhasin, one of the first of the new generation of women Indian adult education trainers, in a recent article in *Convergence* challenged the process of 'development' itself, which she

said aids only the elite.[6] She accused development of being very materialistic, narrowly economistic, patriarchal and paternalist. The benefits of development, she argued, did not reach the ordinary people, who were merely objectified or targeted by the process, which, in effect, served only the interests of the dominant group. Another aspect of development was its tendency towards the centralisation of resources and culture and the consequent destruction of diversity and difference. In an interesting feminist trope she characterised 'male development' as 'mal-development' – ecologically unsound, subservient to economics and the pursuit of power. The consequences of the decades of so-called development had been to dehumanise ordinary people and further marginalise and disempower women.

Bhasin suggested embarking upon a search for sustainable development which is not ecologically and humanly catastrophic but holistic and tolerant of diversity. It should be women-centred. She claimed that this changed understanding of development had already led to qualitative change in the function of voluntary organisations or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Organisations like Gonoshathya Kendra, Nijera Kori, SEWA and the Chipko Movement had become less the deliverers of a government service than agencies of self-help, which proved that the poor were able to run their own lives and plan their own development. Moreover, they showed that poor women were the best managers of scarce resources:

> *In the last few years a shift is visible in the focus and programs of many progressive NGOs. Instead of spending most of their energies implementing projects, they have been forced to mobilise to challenge those development policies and programs which marginalise the poor further, which cause damage to the environment and which further empower the rich.*[7]

Thus many programmes have taken on a more oppositional role in relation to government development plans, particularly as they affected the environment. Hence schemes to create new dams, capital-intensive fisheries, missile bases and plans to give prime land to agro-multinationals, have all been stubbornly resisted by NGOs.

From these considerations Bhasin urges that the training of development workers must reflect the changed priorities, which recognised the creative energy of the people to deal with problems

that government policy seemed only to worsen. Adult education workers now had to become sensitive partners to the people, not their bosses. Their role was not to extend ready-made knowledge and solutions but to set in motion collective reflection and decision-making. Although in some ways the rhetoric of MOTT's radical populism is repeated here, Bhasin's emphasis was far more on the genuinely participatory and dialogic. More emphasis is placed on the mutual learning and sharing between the activist and the people and she sharply rejects the notion of 'the correct ideology' which merely has to be imparted for all problems to be solved. The activist should help set in motion a process of thinking, reflection and action, which may reach conclusions she may not necessarily agree with, through democratic, non-hierarchical and collective methods of work.

The consequences for designing a programme of training for adult education activists are serious. 'Training' itself may not be quite the appropriate word, for it is no longer used in a narrow technical sense but should be seen as a continuous process which involves questioning and self-discovery, acquiring social and human skills, values and 'behaviour patterns'.[8] The whole emphasis of the training should be on developing negotiating skills, preparedness to question assumed values and answers, acquiring positive values, challenging authority and bringing out the joy in the work. As far as possible all training should be participatory. Trainers should be facilitators, enabling the participants to express themselves freely in a workshop-based environment. In fact all the major techniques, as Bhasin makes clear, are derived from women's training workshops in which the principles of the linkage between the personal and the political, and personal change and growth are central.

The eruption of the international women's movement in the 1970s had profound repercussions on adult education in India. Not only were the techniques of women's self-help groups brought to bear on what had conventionally been the male-dominated practice of adult education, but women themselves were treated for the first time as a priority group. Women's under-education and lack of literacy began to be treated not just as a failure of educational policy but as systemic to Indian society. While previously it had been tolerated as an element of traditional society, the new generation of women activists now grew impatient with this and began to treat it as an unjust effect of patriarchy. Much of the new experimentation

in women's education therefore went beyond the problem of literacy to the root causes of women's oppression, and focused on tackling head-on the issues of low status and lack of economic independence.

Women activists began to relate themselves to an historical struggle for women's rights in India which reached back to the Independence struggle itself but had since been neglected. Elements of the movement for women's emancipation had existed since the nineteenth century, when, in some senses paradoxically, it was Christian missionaries who had introduced education for girls. During the early years of the twentieth century the movement was furthered by the campaigner for Indian independence, Annie Besant, who as well as leading the theosophical movement was an energetic socialist and feminist. Madhuri Shah, introducing an important collection of case studies in women's education in India, noted that during the *Swadeshi* movement 'thousands of women living traditional lives came out into the streets, picketed shops selling foreign goods ... went to jail and participated in processions side by side with men'.[9] Despite these ruptures, however, traditional attitudes reasserted themselves and, as we have seen in previous chapters, women's educational standards dropped seriously behind those of the men. The new generation of late-1970s activists saw women as the key to development, as Bhasin has suggested. Women's education had to be seen in the context of a larger political agenda of emancipation from male domination which itself was equated with centralised, bureaucratic and complacent mismanagement. Since men were holding back development and the energies of the nation, women's education had to be linked to radical political change. Madhuri Shah's introduction to her case studies is characteristic of the new-found confidence and militancy of the new generation:

> *any programme for the non-formal education of women will, if successful, bring about a change in the woman's attitude to herself, to her social relationships, to her aspirations and her environment. This will bring an end to male dominated society. Every successful developmental programme will change the status quo. Dominant groups and elites have to be resigned and prepared to accept that they may not remain privileged in the new order of things.*[10]

The key to the new order would be women's full participation

in development, and for the first time Indian women were to be given a voice in this process.

The educational agenda shifted radically away from simple literacy classes towards programmes of self-help through which women from the lower castes could get gainful employment and financial independence. Education about family planning, nutrition and child-care was also important, but the emphasis shifted from feelings of self-pity to self-reliance. Education was accompanied in many instances by employment projects which utilised women's traditional skills. In fact, in perhaps the most successful cases, the emphasis was on creating an employment project which was simultaneously conceived as a total learning process. Non-formal methods were also having a significant effect in shifting the emphasis away from 'education' as a conventionally taught activity towards 'learning'.

This required changing conventional attitudes towards lower-caste women and to education. One of the most persistent problems had been the tendency of middle-class and upper-caste women to dominate the management of the programmes and to treat education as a kind of charitable *donnée*. This, it was now argued, brought the wrong kind of aura to the project and also reinforced traditional dependencies. Shah insisted that the most successful programmes were those in which there was the grass-roots participation of women who identified their own needs and learned to organise themselves without undue guidance from more privileged women. The new pattern of educational activity shows a remarkable homogeneity across India, whether conducted in rural or urban situations. The flexibility of non-formal methods over schoolroom-based education revealed a widespread similarity in the needs of women such that new groups were regularly incorporated into activities initially set up for others.

Another aspect of the new pattern of activity was the mixed sponsorship of the schemes. One of the oldest schemes, founded in the early 1970s, was the Education for Living programme in Delhi. This was funded from government sources, international voluntary agencies, trusts and donations. The mobile crèche also raised funds from its own activities, such as the sale of spices, cards and jumble sales. This, and the high level of voluntary commitment, increased the level of local autonomy and to an extent reduced bureaucratic interference. Unlike formal, class-based programmes, it was able to respond flexibly to perceived needs. The programme grew

around the need for mobile crèches for women working on building sites and evolved organically into fairly complex integrated programmes which involved the whole family group.

The main object of the Education for Living programme was to create awareness, knowledge and skills required for a better family life within a constrained environment. The non-formal education was therefore constructed around health, nutrition and practicalities of everyday life fed by a constant interaction between staff and the target group during work-breaks. Formal literacy classes were included in the project which met five nights weekly after work for two hours, but the makeshift nature of it was poignantly revealed in Shah's description:

> *A typical literacy class for female construction workers is held by the light of a petromax lamp in a little cleared space in the middle of a colony. Children generally sleep or play around the class; while the evening meal is not yet over in some huts ... An hour or so is devoted to a formal lesson with individual attention for each, and the rest of the time to a discussion. Once a week a session of devotional songs is held.*[11]

The crèche found that already existing material for adult learners was not suitable for the immigrant construction workers and so designed its own based on stories and topical events relevant to them. They designed flash cards, discussion charts, games, audio-visual aids and puppets. The programme also generated its own folk theatre group, *Lok Doot* (People's Messenger) in 1976 as a medium of communication and entertainment – the two not regarded as separate – which grew initially out of a lack of access to recreational facilities. *Lok Doot* created plays around themes of relevance to the workers such as alcoholism, superstition, child marriage, civic responsibilities, nutrition and prevention of illness, interweaving jokes, skits, mimes and music.

As the programme of the mobile crèche developed so there was a continuous need for trained personnel. A programme of training evolved and was constantly reviewed, the focus of which was developing practical abilities on site. Workshops and regular problem-solving meetings between the staff and the community strengthened morale and increased camaraderie. Each training centre was run by a team of teachers and crèche workers, although much of the training was done alongside workers in the field. All categories of staff received regular training and contributed to joint

policy-making meetings. This example of non-formal education shows how more open, flexible and creative patterns of educational activity can be evolved through experiential processes without the need to over-invest in heavyweight theory or formal devices. The fact that most of the standard curriculum material for literacy classes was jettisoned in favour of material generated on the spot suggests how important the participatory aspect is for successful learning.

A second case study worth noting is that of the Working Women's Forum in Tamil Nadu. This was a more ambitious and more radical programme which focused on a group of destitute women in Madras and enabled them to become self-sufficient. It was started by a charismatic political and social worker, Jaya Arunachalam, in 1978 under the auspices of the community development wing of the Madras Metropolitan Development Agency. Its core was a working credit system whereby groups of women could obtain loans for small businesses using Arunachalam as an intermediary. It built up a very efficient credit delivery system with high rates of repayment and low rates of interest. Thus the women had a strong material interest in being identified with the programme. The whole exercise, however, was conceived educationally so that each stage became a self-contained learning process in group self-sufficiency.

A distinguishing characteristic of the scheme was that it was from the beginning conceived as a self-help scheme, almost along the lines of a trade union or co-operative, rather than a one-off intervention. The women who came to seek credit were asked to organise themselves collectively and elect one of their number to represent them as a group. From an initial 300 members in 1978, membership grew to nearly 9,000 by the mid-1980s, organised in 350 groups. Of the 5,000 people who received loans, 90% repaid in full, a remarkable achievement. The WWF rapidly became a movement of women's liberation for:

> *women living in conditions of abject poverty, burdened with umpteen children, earning incomes below the poverty line, faced with high maternal and infant mortality rates, living in unhygienic environments, illiterate and unaware of their rights, cheated by money-lenders, middlemen and their husbands – the women found solace in this organisation, not only to obtain credit at a low percentage (4 per cent), but also a* good counsellor for other problems *(original emphasis).*[12]

The WWF registered its own Co-operative Credit Society in 1981 to get over some of the difficulties of working with national banks, with each of its members as a shareholder. Other activities included a family planning programme, night coaching classes for children, craft classes and day-care centres for children. More radical was the action against taken against the indignities and insecurities of common law marriages. In a remarkable public rejection of male authority the WWF performed mass, inter-caste and dowry-free weddings. In 1981 it also turned to rural development and assisted 400 landless women agricultural labourers to acquire livestock and provided them with technical know-how.

The evaluators of the scheme claim that the positive effects of the WWF have been to raise the self-esteem of the women involved and because they are more financially independent they have a greater say in the home and the community. They were able to take greater control over their own fertility and thus move away from their traditional status as brood-mares. Standards of living improved and attitudes changed markedly. The women were no longer content to allow exploitation and oppression to go unchecked, especially by husbands and money lenders and the social structure generally. They became aware of 'woman power' as the result of solidarity with other women. As a result the WWF became a substantial pressure group and possibly the base for a new social movement.

The reasons for the success of the WWF were various. Its rootedness in the local community was important with the key positions in the group all occupied by local women rather than outsiders. Through direct participatory management, issues were chosen for discussion by the groups themselves and the governing body, formed of the 350 group leaders, and the forum responded quickly to expressed needs. Consciousness of group strength, deliberately fostered by non-formal education, was effective in counteracting 'traditional' fatalism in the face of adversity. The women enjoyed feelings of greater status, supported by the participatory mechanisms and took pride in their ability to pay back loans. Arunachalam's charismatic leadership is clearly of no little importance since it was she, as president of the governing body, who undertook all the complex negotiations with the banks, donor agencies, government officials and international organisations, but, equally, the membership was kept clearly informed about all activities. After her, the function of the group leaders was crucial

since it was they, rather than individual members of the group, who took responsibility to negotiate with bank officials about loans and to pay them back. This process threw up a kind of organic leadership whose financial and organisational responsibilities made them into informal community leaders as well.

The material base given to the organisation through the control of money was clearly a key feature in its efficacy. No government funding except for specific projects was involved, and apart from funding from private donor agencies the WWF was supported by its members' contributions alone. This guaranteed them political independence and allowed them the space to dissent from both state and government policies. Overheads were kept low by the essentially voluntary nature of the WWF, but it also promoted self-motivation and group leaders accepted the role of change agents within the community. The sense of a 'new social movement' was generated by the WWF's social critique, which systematically attacked the divisive features of caste, religion and politics, while teaching tolerance of other religions.

Undoubtedly the growth of feminist consciousness was the key and this has generated a high level of political consciousness, where the members see their struggle to develop the confidence and understanding to engage in social and collective activity to change themselves and their social context. A part of this process has been the realisation that oppression and discrimination are social constructs, not inevitable features of human existence. The evaluators regarded the most important source of the WWF's strength, however, as its non-formal education strategies which integrated the two sub-systems of the total learning system, the incidental and the non-formal.

No doubt some would counsel a note of caution here. As Shahida Lateef has shown, Muslim women have specific problems which are not automatically resoluble.[13] Although the WWF project in Madras is an outstanding example of participatory development, equally it may not be replicable elsewhere, because of the special combination of characteristics in Madras. Charismatic social workers like Arunachalam are rare and the high level of political commitment among the workers may well be the product of specifically local circumstances – of which one was quite clearly a highly developed feminist consciousness. A survey by Madras Institute of Development in 1982, for example, found that more than 80% of animator-trainees held negative attitudes towards the rural

poor and that the training offered by the project officers had little effect:

> *The lack of confidence and ideological commitment among literacy teachers undercut the grand intentions for structural transformation of the NAEP: some tutors actually became more conservative through the experience, adopting the view that poverty and illiteracy were the fault of the poor and the illiterate who failed through sloth and lack of motivation.*[14]

Alan Rogers's own survey of literacy animators carried out in the late 1980s concluded that the fault lay less in the animators themselves than in the supervisors and agencies who utilised them. He noted that the animators 'too often lose their own motivation when they see the apparent lack of motivation from those "above" them'.[15] However, many of the characteristics of the scheme – such as its centredness in employment creation, its libertarian democratic structures, its freedom from government and corporate interference and most of all its commitment to participation – could be extended to other contexts. Rogers has no doubt that participation is the key to effective development but he too cautions against 'the romanticization of participatory approaches as the cure-all for adult education' and notes that it is rarely fully successful.[16]

What it offers, though, is an attitude towards those on the receiving end of 'development' which situates them less as objects of an impersonal process than as the potential subjects of their own personal transformation and as agents of social change. Rogers argues that development workers are showing themselves less adept at participatory techniques than adult educators, from whom they must learn. It is a question of working with and not doing for, essentially a partnership rather than a directorate. He implies that the elements necessary for the participatory approach have always been instinctive for adult educationalists, rather than having to be imposed. Participatory methods, perhaps, should instead be seen as a taxonomy of 'best practice'. His own account of this is excellent:

> *The rejection of hierarchy and the desirability of negotiating learning, of sharing in decision making, of equality in learning – all these feature in adult education and point in the same direction. Again the concentration by adult educators on active-learning methods, the recognition of the relative*

> *ineffectiveness of the lecture-demonstration ... the need to encourage learners to do as much as possible for themselves, particularly so that planned learning may continue once the class has come to an end and the tutor is no longer present, all these lead to participatory work in adult education programmes.*[17]

He agrees with the critique of 'development' advanced by Bhasin and others that it has in many cases deprived the people of control over their communities and environment and has effectively disempowered them, contrary to its presumed intention. But while the political response to this form of development has forced the agencies to take up at least the rhetoric of participation, it is not so clear that their practice has always benefited. One indicative account describes a 'participatory' family planning camp which kept 30 women sitting on the floor listening to lectures and demonstrations for an hour and a half. On asking what was participatory about it, he was told by the organiser, 'Well, they listened'!

It is also easy to lose sight of the fact participation, however desirable as a method, is not the end of developmental activity. Despite the querulousness which now surrounds this almost evacuated term, it should be some form of 'empowerment'. People should in the end be able to do something better, the quality of their lives should be enriched, their environment should be more conducive to life, and so on. Participatory methods are assumed to enhance these outcomes, although Rogers is properly sceptical, noting that in South American countries those who participated in the revolutions were not necessarily better off than those who did not, that many fishing communities with co-operatives remain poor and that greater participation in government has in many cases led not to peace but conflict. It has to be asked just whose ends participation serves, those of the target group or those of the agency. But Rogers suggests that participation has a minimal value which is that 'in some form or other (it) would seem to be a necessary antecedent for self-reliance'.[18]

Given these qualifications, Rogers believes that participation is a desirable intermediate goal to which adult education can contribute, from which flow a number of criteria germane to adult education. Learning by doing is preferable simply to learning about something, since engaging in the desired activity (broken down into manageable steps) is the most sure way of learning how to do it. Given the proper preparation, participation reduces de-

pendence on the change agent. The approach must be sensitive and gradual but not so slow that frustration destroys the groundwork.

In the end what he appears to be suggesting is a balancing of expectations which must be neither too paternalistic as in conventional input development, which assumes the target group is naive and childlike, nor wholly populist, as in perhaps the more idealistic participatory development, which assumes a natural plenitude of folk wisdom. A distance learning course on rural development quoted by Rogers appears elegantly, if conservatively, to summarise the problem. Since each community is likely to be heterogeneous the conclusion to be reached by numerous country-wide studies is that rural people are both considerably more capable than the paternalist approach suggests but generally less able to effect spontaneous autonomous activity than the populist approach. The paternalist approach implies that the people will never rise to maturity, which thus makes a development programme logically inconsistent, while the populist approach implies that they already possess the truth and thus do not need development – or education. The populist approach also neglects the fact that deeply entrenched local interests often dominate the community and unless there is some higher rule of law, the local organisations are likely to serve the dominant minority. The course summary concludes: 'Therefore we must look at the strategy of rural development in terms of a system which is neither top-down nor bottom-up, nor exclusively governmental ... it should be based on a network of decision-making'.[19]

From this analysis Rogers suggests three possible alternative approaches in developmental adult education. Firstly, those programmes which are 'agency-designed' and are in fact the majority of all programmes, contain the least element of participation and are mostly a process of persuasion of the community to accept and internalise the objectives of the government or state. The second, 'participant-requested' programmes, are at the other end of the spectrum, where the change agent acts as a facilitator to the community-determined goals. In reality, often this is merely the point of entry of the community into what is substantially the agency's agenda. This course of action is best pursued with groups which are already well-motivated and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. Since the participating groups will be already well-formed, this solution leans more towards the 'adult education' end of the spectrum than that of 'development'. The third ap-

proach, and for Rogers the one with the most potential, is that of 'negotiation', such that the programme of developmental education is in fact arrived at through joint decision-making (although this begs the question of unequally distributed power relations in the negotiation). However, with good faith on the part of the agency – or perhaps a contract – the subject of the programme, format, timing, pace of learning and so on can be mutually agreed, and beneficial.

With the relative exhaustion of the radical populism of the late 1970s and 1980s – or its mutation into religious and sectarian violence and the resurgence of conservative attitudes towards women and the oppressed – clearly some sort of negotiation is central to developmental adult education. The language of radical populism benefited enormously from the development of women's liberation movements, which substituted more genuinely egalitarian procedures for revolutionary rhetoric. The rather stridently male-based rhetoric of the earlier period, which cast the change agents in the role of revolutionary supermen was necessarily fragile when faced with the realities of conservative village power structures. However, it raised the standard of the oppressed and the 'hidden from history' from which the movement for women's education was renewed. By leaving on one side the larger questions of global political theory and concentrating on changing the everyday experience of women through pragmatic reforms and solidarity, a more 'modern' but a more deeply-rooted adult education practice has emerged.

Notes

1. Interview with Professor Daswani, Leeds, October, 1991.
2. Henry Volken, Ajoy Kumar and Sara Kaithathara, *Learning from the Rural Poor* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1982), p. 96.
3. *ibid.*, p. 97.
4. *ibid.*, p. 99.
5. *ibid.*, p. 99.
6. Kamla Bhasin, 'Participatory development demands participatory training', *Convergence*, vol. xxiv, no. 4, 1991, p. 5.
7. *ibid.*, p. 7.
8. *ibid.*, p. 10.
9. Madhuri Shah, *Without Women No Development: Selected case*

studies from Asia of non-formal education for women (Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 1986), p. 6.

10. *ibid.*, p. 7.
11. *ibid.*, p. 18.
12. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 28.
13. Shahida Lateef, *Muslim Women in India: Political and private realities* (New Delhi: Zed Books, 1991).
14. Quoted in Alan Rogers, *Partners in Literacy: A pilot attitudinal survey of literacy animators in Tamil Nadu, India* (Burnham Market: Education for Development, 1989), p. 20.
15. *ibid.*, p. 29.
16. Alan Rogers, *Adults Learning for Development* (Cassell, 1992), p. 227.
17. *ibid.*, p. 227.
18. *ibid.*, p. 234.
19. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 236.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Towards a Transformative Pedagogy

Almost half a century after Independence, India still bears the marks of the system of colonial socialisation cultivated by the British Raj. It is still a largely agricultural country with little industrialisation and massive rural poverty. Barely 50% of its population is literate, falling to 40% among women, and currently the figure appears to be stagnating. In some of the poorer states like Rajasthan the figures for illiteracy rise far higher, a fact made even more acute when it is realised that in Kerala the figures for literacy are 95% for men and 87% for women. Education has made inroads into illiteracy through a succession of campaigns under the Five Year Plans and under the slow development of primary education. Currently, the National Literacy Mission aims at a target of 100 million learners by the end of the eighth Five Year Plan in 1997, a fitting target for the Jubilee. Arjun Singh, the Minister for Human Resources, claims the current campaign is 'the biggest ever civil or military mobilisation in human history',[1] which aims to mobilise 10 million volunteers with the aim of creating a ratio of tutor to learners of 1:10. Such claims and high ideals have been frequent in the progress of literacy campaigns in India, as we have seen, but the results never quite match the rhetoric. Perhaps the current campaign will be different.

We have tried to indicate how this situation is a consequence of educational policies initiated by the British and continued under the Congress Party, despite the opposition of leading educationalists and often against the idealism of educational reformers such as Azad, Gandhi and Tagore. We have also analysed the ways in which this educational problematic is connected to wider ideological arguments.

In many ways the rhythm of the Five Year Plans has exaggerated what can be seen almost as an eternal recurrence of the dis-

covery of illiteracy. The wheel of rhetoric and policy decision then announces another unparalleled campaign of mass mobilisation which will eradicate the problem once and for all. But the resources are never found and the political will collapses in the face of vested interest and the sheer immensity of the problem. However, in the post-NAEP period, since the late 1970s, there is ample evidence of a new-found radicalism in the NGOs which has crystallised dramatically in women's education. Often funded by external bodies, these innovatory and experimental projects have shifted the government's own policy into a much greater devolution of responsibility. Much of the old wastage, falsification of figures and corruption seems to have been transcended and the youthful energies of many of the educated professionals have been channelled into voluntary work. The issue arises, though, that no matter how much energy is put into individual campaigns there is an obstacle to progress in the system itself, that in the end there is a socio-economic and cultural loop which always works in favour of the privileged elite and against the interests of the masses of the poor. To what extent is this true, and how far is this the result of the colonial legacy?

As we have seen, although the project of imperialist politicians such as Macaulay was to create an assimilable Anglicised elite which would buttress the colonial administration, the ideals of many educationalists were sincerely aimed at enlightenment in their own terms. The enlightenment they foresaw was focused on eradicating superstition and irrationalism and the introduction of rationalist and modernist modes of thought appropriate for running a modern colonial economy. It would be quite mistaken, however, to see Britain's colonial policy as one of maintaining and extending ignorance and primitivism in India. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence that Britain was willing to foster Indian advancement to independence even as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. By and large the British in India who had any true regard for education saw it as a means of achieving some degree of reform. There were many like Forster's fictional 'Fielding' in *A Passage to India* and the real Edward Thompson, the father of the historian and adult educator E.P. Thompson, for whom education was unequivocally the instrument of social and political emancipation. It is well-known that most of the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement received a 'good' English education, as we discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to Nehru.

There was some disparity, then, between the political ambitions of the British colonial administration – which as a group tended to accept the social and ideological conformism of its own narrow education in the English public school system – and education itself. As in the English system, the model favoured was one which concentrated resources on the privileged elite. This, however, represents it as if it were a carefully made choice of experts sifting the results of painstaking surveys and attentively listening to theoretical debate, but this is highly unlikely. The greater imperative was more likely vested interest and a collaboration between the imperialist and indigenous elites, in which such educational debate as took place was less than distanced. Indeed, the strength of colonial conformism lay precisely in its ideological assumptions about the 'natural' way for society to be ordered: this self-confidence and establishment common sense led to a lack of any real questioning of the elite model of educational structure and practice in British India. The sole, and minimal, justification given for this system was that somehow the benefits of education and culture would trickle down to the masses. Indigenous, traditional and folk methods were assumed to take care of their day-to-day needs, and life would go on much as it always had done.

But there was something problematic about the educational policy and practice of the Raj, which has been variously characterised as Eurocentric, paternalistic and racialist. As Edward Said has shown, the European construction of Orientalism offered a cultural legitimation for the colonial mission. Since the innate superiority of European civilisation and enlightenment was automatically assumed, the actual difference of Indian identity was not recognised or respected, other than as a threat to 'universal', European or, specifically, English standards. Although it is not true to say that any attempt was made, systematically, to expunge Indian identity, English education was offered as the next stage in achieving civilised status. A crucial feature of this education was precisely that it was conducted in English, centred on English literature and was little interested in science or technology. English language, and the cultural legacy which it opened up, was the 'natural' gate which had to be unlocked for economic advancement and high social position.

However, as we have argued, there were, as is always the case, contradictions inherent in the uncontrollable nature of education, which allowed a minority to use what they had learned *against* the

ideology itself. With the growth of graduate unemployment and lack of advancement within the colonial system there emerged the nationalist movement, which through English education and liberal scholarship had come into contact with not only oppositional ideas and alternative histories to those of colonialism but also with the whole perspective of critical questioning and sceptical intellectual practice. As is so often the case, however, the movement of opposition was in fact ideologically conditioned by and within the prevailing, British culture of colonialism, and its radicalism was thus severely constrained from the outset. And, as a consequence, the new generation of Indian historiography has argued, the nationalist elite bore all too many of the characteristics of its colonial masters.

Thus, in the post-colonial period, the governing of India has been conducted by no less a self-confirming elite than it had been under the British and the distance between this elite and the mass of Indian society, which occurred under the English-based system, has diminished relatively little. Typical of current Indian critical opinion are the views of T.V. Sathyamurthy, who says that the Indian ruling classes 'bear the unmistakable imprint of influences inherited from the colonial era'.[2] For him there is no doubt that colonial educational policy was responsible: 'the nineteenth century liberal policy of limited assimilation of a small proportion of Indians through English education produced results which have lasted well into the era of independence and *show no signs of fading*' (our emphasis).[3]

As in Britain, education was a means of reproducing the self-legitimating elite which constantly tipped the balance of resources in its own favour; but in India the degree of such imbalance has been much more extreme. A broad consensus on national education for the balanced development of all sections of Indian society never emerged and the disparity between the educated elite and the labouring masses was and is one of the most acute in the world. As in Britain, the Indian elite has opted for a system of private education for its own children because of the automatic access to circles of privilege and influence, and the ability to make small talents shine, which involvement in such a system offers. In addition, but to a far greater extent, the state education system is woefully under-financed.

The British system also had the effect of rewarding conformity and loyalty to authority regardless of its legitimacy, of regarding enlightened self-interest as a higher form of morality, and of as-

suming that because virtue is always rewarded, individuals who did not achieve a high status had only themselves to blame. Sathyamurthy further argues that this phenomenon was so deep-seated that even by the time the Crown, in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, had taken over responsibility for Indian education, a class of Indians had emerged whose interest in English education was economic advancement rather than rational enlightenment. This class, then, lay like an absorbent but refracting layer between the colonial power and the indigenous people and mediated all communications between the two.

In the absence of state intervention under the Raj, Christian missionaries increasingly took responsibility for such popular primary education as there was. Although this had the predictable consequences of religious conversion for many, the results were again not entirely foreseen, for one of the achievements of these schools was the coming into being of a substantial dissenting minority which took a critical stance towards the Raj as a whole. Nevertheless, the outcome of this policy was the expansion of higher education, almost entirely for the benefit of the children of the economically privileged, and an almost vestigial primary and popular adult education. Thus the educational question became inseparable from the cultural and the political. Regardless of religious, ethnic, caste and linguistic division, which in themselves made the notion of an 'Indian nation' an enormous imaginative leap, the most significant division was between the elite who shared their privileges regardless of cultural origins, and the absolute mass of the population. As Sathyamurthy persuasively argues, they constituted a separate but culturally complex class whose identity was tossed hopelessly between metropolitan master and subaltern colonial:

> *The relationship between the newly arisen English educated middle class in India and the mass of the people was contradictory and ambiguous. At the heart of the contradiction lay the fact that this class did not possess an authentically Indian character. It was at best a poor imitation of its metropolitan opposite; it originated no new ideas and methods; there was little that was indigenous about it except its skin colour; in short it was a partially deracinated minor fraction of the larger Indian society.*[4]

Except for a critical minority, it also appeared a remarkably

unproductive class, having learned few skills in industrial or craft production and having been inculcated with an exaggerated respect for the more uncritical aspects of English literary culture. It was for this reason that Gandhi, and (though for sharply different reasons) Nehru, believed an English arts education was worse than a waste of time. This class, after Independence had been negotiated, inherited the machinery of state government in which they were already well-entrenched and had little vested interest in changing. It is also true, however, that Nehru and the Congress Party had a genuine commitment to achieving a modernist revolution in India: the transformation of a backward, rural society into an industrialised, modern state, complete with all the benefits of material welfare and political democracy. Undoubtedly, this Fabian-inspired, Western-rooted scheme was flawed, not least in its elitist and hierarchical conceptions. Tracing the attempt to mobilise education, especially adult education, as a motor of this project has contributed much of the subject matter of this study; and it provides one graphic example of the inadequacies of Congress's ideological perspective.

How is this gap between rhetorical commitment and (relative) paucity of achievement to be explained? A large part of the answer lies in the arguments made earlier in this chapter: the perpetuation of elitist rule after 1947 by a fundamentally Western-oriented ruling group. But, as we argued in Chapters 2 and 3, the perspective and programmes of Nehru and the Congress leadership were in fact more realistic and, in many ways, more socialist than the idiosyncratic and romantic, although eternally beguiling, alternative offered by Gandhi. The problems of achieving fundamental social, cultural and political change in India were not unique. Although the sheer scale of the task, and the very limited resources available, created a formidable challenge, the basic political problem of how to achieve such change was – and is – common to Indian and Western European societies (and to many others besides). In this broad sense, Nehru's and Gandhi's perspectives fall within two regular and opposed archetypal formations: the elitist, centralist and bureaucratic model; and the romantic, populist, charismatic but politically volatile model.

The burden of our argument in the context of educational development in India has been that neither of these frameworks in its pure form could have been successful. Leaving on one side the very real – and indeed overwhelming – logistical problems of re-

sources and scale, there were insuperable structural problems. The specific elements of the Indian context have been discussed earlier. It is important, however, to emphasise here that at one level they are further examples of the inadequacies common to most movements for fundamental change in the West as well as in India. To attempt to achieve fundamental change purely on a top-down model has always produced to date one or other of two negative, even disastrous consequences. Either the result has been the mild and ultimately ineffectual reformism of social democracy, as in the British Labour Party; or it has been the bureaucratic, and often much worse, brutalism of Soviet-style Communism. As we have seen, Nehru's politics in effect wavered between the two models (and was ultimately much closer to the first), but he never departed from his elitist context: indeed, he was unable to detach himself and his party from its elitist, colonial heritage. Gandhi and his followers, on the other hand, were ultimately unrealistic, over-reaching idealists who were powerless to affect events. (The parallel with the romantic and Conservative 'Young England' movement of the mid-nineteenth century is uncomfortably close.)

We discussed in some detail in Chapters 6 and 7 what in our view are more hopeful models for development educationally. The fundamental common concepts and approaches in the perspectives described again conform to international archetypes. They are characterised by bottom-up rather than top-down approaches – 'starting where people are', negotiating curricular consent and ensuring that provision is relevant to the perceived needs of the people. Equally important, educational provision is an integral part of a wider social movement, not exclusively linked to the local or national state. The ideological thrust of the position is best characterised as libertarian socialist and is heavy with implications of anti-bureaucratic, anti-centralist and anti-Communist perspectives. Just as the New Left (generally defined) in the West has been characterised by this libertarian and extra-parliamentary radicalism, so in India the successful experiments in educational innovation have stemmed from relatively small-scale but firmly rooted initiatives, examples of which were described in Chapters 6 and 7.

To an extent the contradictory legacy of the British Raj in educational terms has contributed to this movement. The liberal tradition was not a monolithic perspective, and it did not concentrate wholly on elitist, class rule: there was an important element of critical, sceptical thinking and indeed a substantive input of

straightforwardly similar ideas. (See, for example, Nehru's proclaimed affinity with Morris, Tawney and Fabian ideas, and Gandhi's with a whole range of radical thinkers, as noted in Chapters 2 and 3.) Just as in Britain, this legacy produced in India both conservatives/conformists and socialists/radicals. In India the central connection is clear between this tradition, the Congress Party's nationalism and the more radical ideological stance of those contemporary intellectuals and activists discussed in Chapter 6.

Adult education in India has been too complex and variegated a phenomenon to summarise in any simple formation, especially so given its essentially contentious context politically. Perhaps the final point we would wish to emphasise is that the story so far indicates the primary importance of adult educators working with people in their localities and on their terms, but with a clear and articulated radical agenda which contains industrial and political objectives. The superficially attractive alternatives of either working at the macro-state level or of returning to some mythical rural golden age have been shown to be mistaken. Undoubtedly, there are political lessons here which extend far wider than the educational context.

Notes

1. *Literacy Mission*, vol. xvi, nos 6–11, June–November 1993, p. 27.
2. T.V. Sathyamurthy, 'Victorians, socialisation and imperialism: consequences for post-imperial India', in J.A. Mangan, ed., *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British imperialism* (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 110.
3. *ibid.*, p. 111, our emphasis.
4. *ibid.*, p. 117.

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IJAE = Indian Journal of Adult Education

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Learning Independence

A Political Outline of Indian Adult Education

Tom Steele and Richard Taylor

Adult education in all societies is a politically-charged activity, and this has been particularly the case in India. Whether seen as a means of ensuring social control and cultural incorporation, or, in sharply contrasting terms, as an agency of radical democratisation and empowerment, adult education in India has always had a strongly political dimension. *Learning Independence* analyses the failures, successes and future potential of adult education in India since the 1940s. The authors focus on the legacy of British rule and on the perspectives of Gandhi, Nehru and the new social movements of more recent years, particularly the women's movement.

Learning Independence is not an orthodox historical review, but offers for the first time a political analysis of the role of adult education as an agency of cultural and ideological significance in post-Independence India. It outlines the important part which adult education can play in the development of a more democratic and just society in India, and points to the lessons which the West might usefully learn from India in terms of a more transformative and participatory adult education.

Learning Independence will be of interest to adult educators; all those interested in modern Indian history; all those interested in development and Third World issues; students of comparative education.

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